

MT. ST. MARY'S COLLEGE LIBRARY  
EMMITSBURG, MARYLAND 21721



3 0853 001240CE 5



**This Book Donated To**  
**MT. ST. MARY'S COLLEGE**  
**LIBRARY**

**By**

Thurmont Public Library













THE COMPLETE WORKS  
OF  
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

---

BONCHURCH EDITION

VOL. XII



*The Bonchurch Edition of the Complete  
Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne,  
printed from type that has been dis-  
tributed, is limited to 780 sets, numbered  
1 to 780. Of these 750 are for sale.*

THE COMPLETE WORKS  
OF  
ALGERNON CHARLES  
SWINBURNE

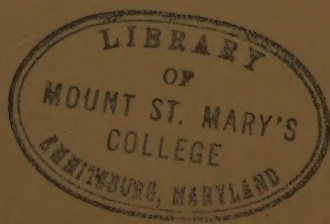
EDITED BY  
SIR EDMUND GOSSE, C.B.  
AND  
THOMAS JAMES WISE

PROSE WORKS

VOL. II

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD.  
NEW YORK: GABRIEL WELLS

1926



THE COMPLETE WORKS

OF

JOHN LOCKE

IN TWO VOLUMES

THE SECOND EDITION

REVISED

BY

JOHN LOCKE

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN



## CONTENTS

### A STUDY OF BEN JONSON—

	PAGE
I. COMEDIES, TRAGEDIES, AND MASQUES . . . . .	3
II. MISCELLANEOUS WORKS . . . . .	64
III. DISCOVERIES . . . . .	87

### CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE—

GREENE, PEELE, AND LODGE . . . . .	127
GEORGE CHAPMAN . . . . .	136
PHILIP MASSINGER . . . . .	252
JOHN DAY . . . . .	289
ROBERT DAVENPORT . . . . .	307
THOMAS NABBES . . . . .	321
RICHARD BROME . . . . .	326
JAMES SHIRLEY . . . . .	339
 JOHN FORD . . . . .	 371
 BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER . . . . .	 409



A STUDY OF BEN JONSON

VOL. XII.

A





## I

### COMEDIES, TRAGEDIES, AND MASQUES

IF poets may be divided into two exhaustive but not exclusive classes—the gods of harmony and creation, the giants of energy and invention—the supremacy of Shakespeare among the gods of English verse is not more unquestionable than the supremacy of Jonson among its giants. Shakespeare himself stands no higher above Milton and Shelley than Jonson above Dryden and Byron. Beside the towering figure of this Enceladus the stature of Dryden seems but that of an ordinary man, the stature of Byron—who indeed can only be classed among giants by a somewhat licentious or audacious use of metaphor—seems little higher than a dwarf's. Not even the ardour of his most fanatical worshippers, from the date of Cartwright and Randolph to the date of Gilchrist and Gifford, could exaggerate the actual greatness of his various and marvellous energies. No giant ever came so near to the ranks of the gods : were it possible for one not born a god to become divine by dint of ambition and devotion, this glory would have crowned the Titanic labours of Ben Jonson. There is something heroic and magnificent in his lifelong dedication of all his gifts and all his powers to the service of the art he had elected as the business of all his life and the aim of all his aspiration. And the result also was magnificent : the flowers of his growing have every quality but one which belongs to the rarest

and finest among flowers : they have colour, form, variety, fertility, vigour : the one thing they want is fragrance. Once or twice only in all his indefatigable career of toil and triumph did he achieve what was easily and habitually accomplished by men otherwise unworthy to be named in the same day with him ; by men who would have avowed themselves unworthy to unloose the latchets of his shoes. That singing power which answers in verse to the odour of a blossom, to the colouring of a picture, to the flavour of a fruit—that quality without which they may be good, commendable, admirable, but cannot be delightful—was not, it should seem, a natural gift of this great writer's : hardly now and then could his industry attain to it by some exceptional touch of inspiration or of luck. It is ' above all strangeness ' that a man labouring under this habitual disqualification should have been competent to recognise with accurate and delicate discernment an occasion on which he had for once risen above his usual capacity—a shot by which he had actually hit the white : but the lyrical verses which Ben Jonson quoted to Drummond as his best have exactly the quality which lyrical verse ought to have and which their author's lyrical verse almost invariably misses ; the note of apparently spontaneous, inevitable, irrepressible and impeccable music. They might have been written by Coleridge or Shelley. But Ben, as a rule—a rule which is proved by the exception—was one of the singers who could not sing ; though, like Dryden, he could intone most admirably ; which is more—and much more—than can truthfully be said for Byron. He, however, as well as Dryden, has one example of lyrical success to show for himself, as exceptional and as unmistakable as Jonson's. The



incantation in *Œdipus*, brief as it is, and the first four stanzas of the incantation in *Manfred*, imitative as they are, reveal a momentary sense of music, a momentary command of the instrument employed, no less singular and no less absolute. But Jonson, at all points the greatest and most genuine poet of the three, has achieved such a success more than once ; has nearly achieved it, or has achieved a success only less absolute than this, more than a few times in the course of his works. And it should be remembered always that poetry in any other sense than the sense of invention or divination, creation by dint of recollection and by force of reproduction, was by no means the aim and end of his ambition. The grace, the charm, the magic of poetry was to him always a secondary if not always an inconsiderable quality in comparison with the weight of matter, the solidity of meaning, the significance and purpose of the thing suggested or presented. The famous men whose names may most naturally and most rationally be coupled with the more illustrious name of Ben Jonson came short of the triumph which might have been theirs in consequence of their worst faults or defects—of the weaker and baser elements in their moral nature ; because they preferred self-interest in the one case and self-indulgence in the other to the noble toil and the noble pleasure of doing their best for their art's sake and their duty's, to the ultimate satisfaction of their conscience ; a guide as sure and a monitor as exacting in æsthetic matters—or, to use a Latin rather than a Greek word, in matters of pure intelligence—as in questions of ethics or morality. But with Ben Jonson conscience was the first and last consideration : the conscience of power which undoubtedly made him arrogant and exacting made

him even more severe in self-exaction, more resolute in self-discipline, more inexorable in self-devotion to the elected labour of his life. From others he exacted much ; but less than he exacted from himself. And it is to this noble uprightness of mind, to this lofty loyalty in labour, that the gravest vices and the most serious defects of his work may indisputably be traced. Reversing the famous axiom of Goldsmith's professional art-critic, we may say of Jonson's work in almost every instance that the picture would have been better if the artist had taken less pains. For in some cases at least he writes better as soon as he allows himself to write with ease—or at all events without elaborate ostentation of effort and demonstrative prodigality of toil. The unequalled breadth and depth of his reading could not but enrich as well as encumber his writings : those who could wish he had been less learned may be reminded how much we should certainly lose—how much of solid and precious metal—for the mere chance of a possible gain in spontaneity and ease ; in qualities of lyrical or dramatic excellence which it is doubtful whether he had received from nature in any degree comparable with those to which his learning gave a fresh impulse and a double force of energetic life. And when his work is at its worst, when his faults are most flagrant, when his tediousness is most unendurable, it is not his learning that is to blame, for his learning is not even apparent. The obtrusion and accumulation of details and references, allusions and citations, which encumber the text and the margin of his first Roman tragedy with such a ponderous mass of illustrative superfluity, may undoubtedly be set down, if not to the discredit, at least to the disadvantage of the poet whose resolute caprice had impelled him to be

author and commentator, dramatist and scholiast, at once : but however tedious a languid or a cursory reader may find this part of Jonson's work, he must, if not abnormally perverse in stupidity, admit that it is far less wearisome, less vexatious, less deplorable and insufferable, than the interminable deserts of dreary dialogue in which the affectations, pretensions, or idiocies of the period are subjected to the indefatigable and the lamentable industry of a caricaturist or a photographer.

There is nothing accidental in the work of Ben Jonson : no casual inspiration, no fortuitous impulse, ever guides or misguides his genius aright or astray. And this crowning and damning defect of a tedious and intolerable realism was even exceptionally wilful and premeditated. There is little if anything of it in the earliest comedy admitted into the magnificent edition which was compiled and published by himself in the year of the death of Shakespeare. And the humours of a still earlier comedy attributed to his hand, and printed apparently without his sanction just seven years before, are not worked out with such wearisome patience nor exhibited with such scientific persistency as afterwards distinguished the anatomical lecturer on vice and folly whose ideal of comic art was a combination of sarcasm and sermon in alternately epigrammatic and declamatory dialogue. I am by no means disposed to question the authenticity of this play, an excellent example of romantic comedy dashed with farce and flavoured with poetry : but, as far as I am aware, no notice has yet been taken of a noticeable coincidence between the manner or the circumstances of its publication and that of a spurious play which had nine years previously been attributed to Shakespeare. Some copies only of *The*

*Case is Altered* bear on the title-page the name of Jonson, as some copies only of *Sir John Oldcastle* bear on the title-page the name of Shakespeare. In the earlier case, there can of course be no reasonable doubt that Shakespeare on his side, or the four actual authors of the gallimaufry on theirs, or perhaps all five together in the common though diverse interest of their respective credits, must have interfered to put a stop to the piratical profits of a lying and thieving publisher by compelling him to cancel the impudently mendacious title-page which imputed to Shakespeare the authorship of a play announced in its very prologue as the work of a writer or writers whose intention was to counteract the false impression given by Shakespeare's caricature, and to represent Prince Hal's old lad of the castle in his proper character of hero and martyr. In the later case, there can be little if any doubt that Jonson, then at the height of his fame and influence, must have taken measures to preclude the circulation under his name of a play which he would not or could not honestly acknowledge. So far, then, as external evidence goes, there is no ground whatever for a decision as to whether *The Case is Altered* may be wholly or partially or not at all assignable to the hand of Jonson. My own conviction is that he certainly had a hand in it, and was not improbably its sole author: but that on the other hand it may not impossibly be one of the compound works on which he was engaged as a dramatic apprentice with other and less energetic playwrights in the dim back workshop of the slave-dealer and slave-driver whose diary records the grinding toil and the scanty wages of his lean and laborious bondsmen. Justice, at least since the days of Gifford, has generally been done to the bright and pleasant quality of this equally romantic

and classical comedy ; in which the passionate humour of the miser is handled with more freshness and freedom than we find in most of Jonson's later studies, while the figure of his putative daughter has more of grace and interest than he usually vouchsafed to be at the pains of bestowing on his official heroines. It is to be regretted, it is even to be deplored, that the influence of Plautus on the style and the method of Jonson was not more permanent and more profound. Had he been but content to follow his first impulse, to work after his earliest model—had he happily preferred those ' Plautinos et numeros et sales ' for which his courtly friend Horace expressed so courtierly a contempt to the heavier numbers and the more laborious humours which he set himself to elaborate and to cultivate instead, we might not have had to applaud a more wonderful and admirable result, we should unquestionably have enjoyed a harvest more spontaneous and more gracious, more generous and more delightful. Something of the charm of Fletcher, his sweet straightforward fluency and instinctive lightness of touch, would have tempered the severity and solidity of his deliberate satire and his heavy-handed realism.

And the noble work of comic art which followed on this first attempt gave even fuller evidence in its earlier than its later form of the author's capacity for poetic as well as realistic success. The defence of poetry which appears only in the first edition of *Every Man in his Humour* is worth all Sidney's and all Shelley's treatises thrown together. A stern and austere devotion to the principle which prohibits all indulgence in poetry, precludes all exuberance of expression, and immolates on the altar of accuracy all eloquence, all passion, and all inspiration



incompatible with direct and prosaic reproduction of probable or plausible dialogue, induced its author to cancel this noble and majestic rhapsody ; and in so doing gave fair and full forewarning of the danger which was to beset this too rigid and conscientious artist through the whole of his magnificent career. But in all other points the process of transformation to which its author saw fit to subject this comedy was unquestionably a process of improvement. Transplanted from the imaginary or fantastic Italy in which at first they lived and moved and had their being to the actual and immediate atmosphere of contemporary London, the characters gain even more in lifelike and interesting veracity or verisimilitude than in familiar attraction and homely association. Not only do we feel that we know them better, but we perceive that they are actually more real and cognisable creatures than they were under their former conditions of dramatic existence. But it must be with regret as well as with wonder that we find ourselves constrained to recognise the indisputable truth that this first acknowledged work of so great a writer is as certainly his best as it certainly is not his greatest. Never again did his genius, his industry, his conscience and his taste unite in the triumphant presentation of a work so faultless, so satisfactory, so absolute in achievement and so free from blemish or defect. The only three others among all his plays which are not unworthy to be ranked beside it are in many ways more wonderful, more splendid, more incomparable with any other product of human intelligence or genius : but neither *The Fox*, *The Alchemist*, nor *The Staple of News* is altogether so blameless and flawless a piece of work ; so free from anything that might as well or better be dispensed with, so simply and



thoroughly compact and complete in workmanship and in result. Molière himself has no character more exquisitely and spontaneously successful in presentation and evolution than the immortal and inimitable Bobadil: and even Bobadil is not unworthily surrounded and supported by the many other graver or lighter characters of this magnificent and perfect comedy.

It is difficult to attempt an estimate of the next endeavours or enterprises of Ben Jonson without incurring either the risk of impatient and uncritical injustice, if rein be given to the natural irritation and vexation of a disappointed and bewildered reader, or the no less imminent risk of one-sided and one-eyed partiality, if the superb literary quality, the elaborate intellectual excellence, of these undramatic if not inartistic satires in dialogue be duly taken into account. From their author's point of view, they are worthy of all the applause he claimed for them; and to say this is to say much; but if the author's point of view was radically wrong, was fundamentally unsound, we can but be divided between condemnation and applause, admiration and regret. No student of our glorious language, no lover of our glorious literature, can leave these miscalled comedies unread without foregoing an experience which he should be reluctant to forego: but no reader who has any sense or any conception of comic art or of dramatic harmony will be surprised to find that the author's experience of their reception on the stage should have driven him by steady gradations of fury and consecutive degrees of arrogance into a state of mind and a style of work which must have seemed even to his well-wishers most unpromising for his future and final triumph. Little if anything can be added to the

excellent critical remarks of Gifford on *Every Man out of his Humour*, *Cynthia's Revels*, and *Poetaster, or his Arraignment*. The first of these magnificent mistakes would be enough to ensure immortality to the genius of the poet capable of so superb and elaborate an error. The fervour and intensity of the verse which expresses his loftier mood of intolerant indignation, the studious and implacable versatility of scorn which animates the expression of his disgust at the viler or crueller examples of social villainy then open to his contemptuous or furious observation, though they certainly cannot suffice to make a play, suffice to make a living and imperishable work of the dramatic satire which passes so rapidly from one phase to another of folly, fraud, or vice. And if it were not an inadmissible theory that the action or the structure of a play might be utterly disjointed and dislocated in order to ensure the complete presentation or development, the alternate exhibition or exposure, of each figure in the revolving gallery of a satirical series, we could hardly fear that our admiration of the component parts which fail to compose a coherent or harmonious work of art could possibly carry us too far into extravagance of applause. The noble rage which inspires the overture is not more absolute or perfect than the majestic structure of the verse: and the best comic or realistic scenes of the ensuing play are worthy to be compared—though it may not be altogether to their advantage—with the similar work of the greatest succeeding artists in narrative or dramatic satire. Too much of the studious humour, too much of the versatile and laborious realism, displayed in the conduct and evolution of this satirical drama, may have been lavished and misused in the reproduction of ephemeral affectations and accidental

forms of folly : but whenever the dramatic satirist, on purpose or by accident, strikes home to some deeper and more durable subject of satire, we feel the presence and the power of a poet and a thinker whose genius was not born to deal merely with ephemeral or casual matters. The small patrician fop and his smaller plebeian ape, though even now not undiverting figures, are inevitably less diverting to us, as they must have been even to the next generation from Jonson's, than to the audience for whom they were created : but the humour of the scene in which the highly intelligent and intellectual lady, who regards herself as the pattern at once of social culture and of personal refinement, is duped and disgraced by an equally simple and ingenious trick played off on her overweening and contemptuous vanity, might have been applauded by Shakespeare or by Vanbrugh, approved by Congreve or Molière. Here, among too many sketches of a kind which can lay claim to no merit beyond that of an unlovely photograph, we find a really humorous conception embodied in a really amusing type of vanity and folly ; and are all the more astonished to find a writer capable of such excellence and such error as every competent reader must recognise in the conception and execution of this rather admirable than delightful play. For Molière himself could hardly have improved on the scene in which a lady who is confident of her intuitive capacity to distinguish a gentleman from a pretender with no claim to that title is confronted with a vulgar clown, whose introducers have assured her that he is a high-bred gentleman masquerading for a wager under that repulsive likeness. She wonders that they can have imagined her so obtuse, so ignorant, so insensible to the difference between gentleman and

clown : she finds that he plays his part as a boor very badly and transparently ; and on discovering that he is in fact the boor she would not recognise, is driven to vanish in a passion of disgust. This is good comedy : but we can hardly say as much for the scene in which a speculator who has been trading on the starvation or destitution of his neighbours and tenants is driven to hang himself in despair at the tidings of a better market for the poor, is cut down by the hands of peasants who have not recognised him, and on hearing their loudly expressed regrets for this act of inadvertent philanthropy becomes at once a beneficent and penitent philanthropist. Extravagant and exceptional as is this instance of Jonson's capacity for dramatic error—for the sacrifice at once of comic art and of common sense on the altar of moral or satirical purpose,—it is but an extreme example of the result to which his theory must have carried his genius, gagged and handcuffed and drugged and blindfolded, had not his genius been too strong even for the force and the persistence of his theory. No reader and no spectator of his next comedy can have been inclined to believe or encouraged in believing that it was. The famous final verse of the epilogue to *Cynthia's Revels* can hardly sound otherwise to modern ears than as an expression of blustering diffidence—of blatant self-distrust. That any audience should have sat out the five undramatic acts of this 'dramatic satire' is as inconceivable as that any reader, however exasperated and exhausted by its voluminous perversities, should fail to do justice to its literary merits ; to the vigour and purity of its English, to the masculine refinement and the classic straightforwardness of its general style. There is an exquisite song in it, and there are passages—nay, there are scenes—of excellent

prose: but the intolerable elaboration of pretentious dullness and ostentatious ineptitude for which the author claims not merely the tolerance or the condonation which gratitude or charity might accord to the misuse or abuse of genius, but the acclamation due to its exercise and the applause demanded by its triumph—the heavy-headed perversity which ignores all the duties and reclaims all the privileges of a dramatic poet—the Cyclopean ponderosity of perseverance which hammers through scene after scene at the task of ridicule by anatomy of tedious and preposterous futilities—all these too conscientious outrages offered to the very principle of comedy, of poetry, or of drama, make us wonder that we have no record of a retort from the exhausted audience—if haply there were any auditors left—to the dogged defiance of the epilogue:—

By God 'tis good, and if you like 't you may.

—By God 'tis bad, and worse than tongue can say.

For the most noticeable point in this studiously wayward and laboriously erratic design is that the principle of composition is as conspicuous by its absence as the breath of inspiration: that the artist, the scholar, the disciple, the student of classic models, is as undiscoverable as the spontaneous humorist or poet. The wildest, the roughest, the crudest offspring of literary impulse working blindly on the passionate elements of excitable ignorance was never more formless, more incoherent, more defective in structure, than this voluminous abortion of deliberate intelligence and conscientious culture.

There is a curious monotony in the variety—if there be not rather a curious variety in the monotony—of character and of style which makes it even more



difficult to resume the study of *Cynthia's Revels* when once broken off than even to read through its burdensome and bulky five acts at a sitting ; but the reader who lays siege to it with a sufficient supply of patience will find that the latter is the surer if not the only way to appreciate the genuine literary value of its better portions. Most of the figures presented are less than sketches and little more than outlines of inexperienced and intolerant caricature : but the ' half-saved ' or (as Carlyle has it) ' insalvable ' coxcomb and parasite Asotus, who puts himself under the tuition of Amorphus and the patronage of Anaides, is a creature with something of real comic life in him. By what process of induction or deduction the wisdom of critical interpreters should have discerned in the figure of his patron, a fashionable ruffler and ruffian, the likeness of Thomas Dekker, a humble, hard-working, and highly-gifted hack of letters, may be explicable by those who can explain how the character of Hedon, a courtly and voluptuous coxcomb, can have been designed to cast ridicule on John Marston, a rude and rough-hewn man of genius, the fellow-craftsman of Ben Jonson as satirist and as playwright. But such absurdities of misapplication and misconstruction, once set afloat on the Lethean waters of stagnating tradition, will float for ever by grace of the very rottenness which prevents them from sinking. Ignorance assumes and idleness repeats what sciolism ends by accepting as a truth no less indisputable than undisputed. To any rational and careful student it must be obvious that until the publication of Jonson's *Poetaster* we cannot trace, I do not say with any certainty of evidence, but with any plausibility of conjecture, the identity of the principal persons attacked or derided by the satirist. And to identify the



originals of such figures as Clove and Orange in *Every Man out of his Humour* can hardly, as Carlyle might have expressed it, be matter of serious interest to any son of Adam. But the famous polemical comedy which appeared a year later than the appearance of *Cynthia's Revels* bore evidence about it, unmistakable by reader or spectator, alike to the general design of the poet and to the particular direction of his personalities. Jonson of course asserted and of course believed that he had undergone gross and incessant provocation for years past from the 'petulant' onslaughts of Marston and Dekker : but what were his grounds for this assertion and this belief we have no means whatever of deciding—we have no ground whatever for conjecture. What we cannot but perceive is the possibly more important fact that indignation and ingenuity, pugnacity and self-esteem, combined to produce and succeeded in producing an incomparably better comedy than the author's last and a considerably better composition than the author's penultimate attempt. Even the 'apologetical dialogue' appended for the benefit of the reader, fierce and arrogant as it seems to us in its bellicose ambition and its quarrelsome self-assertion, is less violent and overweening in its tone than the furious eloquence of the prelude to *Every Man out of his Humour*. The purity of passion, the sincerity of emotion, which inspires and inflames that singular and splendid substitute for an ordinary prologue, never found again an expression so fervent and so full in the many and various appeals of its author to his audience, immediate or imaginary, against the malevolence of enemies or of critics. But in this Augustan satire his rage and scorn are tempered and adapted to something of dramatic purpose ; their expression is more

coherent, if not less truculent—their effect is more harmonious, if not more genuine—than in the two preceding plays.

There is much in the work of Ben Jonson which may seem strange and perplexing to the most devout and rapturous admirer of his genius : there is nothing so singular, so quaint, so inexplicable, as his selection of Horace for a sponsor or a patron saint. The affinity between Virgil and Tennyson, between Shelley and Lucretius, is patent and palpable : but when Jonson assumes the mask of Horace we can only wonder what would have been the sensation on Olympus if Pluto had suddenly proposed to play the part of Cupid, or if Vulcan had obligingly offered to run on the errands of Mercury. This eccentricity of egoism is only less remarkable than the mixture of care and recklessness in the composition of a play which presents us at its opening with an apparent hero in the person, not of Horace, but of Ovid ; and after following his fortunes through four-fifths of the action, drops him into exile at the close of the fourth act, and proceeds with the business of the fifth as though no such figure had ever taken part in the conduct of the play. Shakespeare, who in Jonson's opinion ' wanted art,' assuredly never showed himself so insensible to the natural rules of art as his censor has shown himself here. Apart from the incoherence of construction which was perhaps inevitable in such a complication of serious with satirical design, there is more of artistic merit in this composite work of art than in any play produced by its author since the memorable date of *Every Man in his Humour*. The character of Captain Pantilius Tucça, which seems to have brought down on its creator such a boiling shower-bath or torrent of professional indignation from quarters in which his own

distinguished service as a soldier and a representative champion of English military hardihood would seem to have been unaccountably if not scandalously forgotten, is beyond comparison the brightest and the best of his inventions since the date of the creation of Bobadil. But the decrease in humanity of humour, in cordial and genial sympathy or tolerance of imagination, which marks the advance of his genius towards its culmination of scenical and satirical success in *The Alchemist* must be obvious at this stage of his work to those who will compare the delightful cowardice and the inoffensive pretension of Bobadil with the blatant vulgarity and the flagrant rascality of Tucca.

In the memorable year which brought into England her first king of Scottish birth, and made inevitable the future conflict between the revolutionary principle of monarchy by divine right and the conservative principle of self-government by deputy for the commonweal of England, the first great writer who thought fit to throw in his lot with the advocates of the royalist revolution produced on the boards a tragedy of which the moral, despite his conscious or unconscious efforts to disguise or to distort it, is as thoroughly republican and as tragically satirical of despotism as is that of Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*. It would be well for the fame of Jonson if the parallel could be carried further : but, although *Sejanus his Fall* may not have received on its appearance the credit or the homage due to the serious and solid merit of its composition and its execution, it must be granted that the author has once more fallen into the excusable but nevertheless unpardonable error of the too studious and industrious Martha. He was careful and troubled about many things absolutely superfluous and supererogatory ; matters of no value or concern whatever

for the purpose or the import of a dramatic poem : but the one thing needful, the very condition of poetic life and dramatic interest, he utterly and persistently overlooked. Tiberius, the central character of the action—for the eponymous hero or protagonist of the play is but a crude study of covetous and lecherous ambition—has not life enough in the presentation of him to inform the part with interest. No praise—of the sort which is due to such labours—can be too high for the strenuous and fervid conscience which inspires every line of the laborious delineation : the recorded words of the tyrant are wrought into the text, his traditional characteristics are welded into the action, with a patient and earnest fidelity which demands applause no less than recognition : but when we turn from this elaborate statue—from this exquisitely articulated skeleton—to the living figure of Octavius or of Antony, we feel and understand more than ever that Shakespeare ‘hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from him.’

Coleridge has very justly animadverted on ‘the anachronic mixture’ of Anglican or Caledonian royalism with the conservatism of an old Roman republican in the character of Arruntius : but we may trace something of the same incongruous combination in the character of a poet who was at once the sturdiest in aggressive eagerness of self-assertion, and the most copious in courtly effusion of panegyric, among all the distinguished writers of his day. The power of his verse and the purity of his English are nowhere more remarkable than in his two Roman tragedies : on the other hand, his great fault or defect as a dramatist is nowhere more perceptible. This general if not universal infirmity is one which never seems to have occurred to him, careful and studious though

he was always of his own powers and performances, as anything of a fault at all. It is one indeed which no writer afflicted with it could reasonably be expected to recognise or to repair. Of all purely negative faults, all sins of intellectual omission, it is perhaps the most serious and the most irremediable. It is want of sympathy; a lack of cordial interest, not in his own work or in his own genius—no one will assert that Jonson was deficient on that score—but in the individual persons, the men and women represented on the stage. He took so much interest in the creations that he had none left for the creatures of his intellect or art. This fault is not more obvious in the works of his disciples Cartwright and Randolph than in the works of their master. The whole interest is concentrated on the intellectual composition and the intellectual development of the characters and the scheme. Love and hatred, sympathy and antipathy, are superseded and supplanted by pure scientific curiosity: the clear glow of serious or humorous emotion is replaced by the dry light of analytical investigation. *Si vis me flere*—the proverb is something musty. Neither can we laugh heartily or long where all chance of sympathy or cordiality is absolutely inconceivable. The loving laughter which salutes the names of Dogberry and Touchstone, Mrs. Quickly and Falstaff, is never evoked by the most gorgeous opulence of humour, the most glorious audacity of intrigue, which dazzles and delights our understanding in the parts of Sir Epicure Mammon, Rabbi Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, Morose and Fitzdottrel and Mosca: even Bobadil, the most comically attractive of all cowards and braggarts on record, has no such hold on our regard as many a knave and many a fool of Shakespeare's comic progeny. The triumph of



‘Don Face’ over his confederates, though we may not be so virtuous as to grudge it him, puts something of a strain upon our conscience if it is heartily to be applauded and enjoyed. One figure, indeed, among all the multitude of Jonson’s invention, is so magnificent in the spiritual stature of his wickedness, in the still dilating verge and expanding proportion of his energies, that admiration in this single case may possibly if not properly overflow into something of intellectual if not moral sympathy. The genius and the courage of Volpone, his sublimity of cynic scorn and his intensity of contemptuous enjoyment—his limitless capacity for pleasure and his dauntless contemplation of his crimes—make of this superb sinner a figure which we can hardly realise without some sense of imperious fascination. His views of humanity are those of Swift and of Carlyle : but in him their fruit is not bitterness of sorrow and anger, but rapture of satisfaction and of scorn. His English kinsman, Sir Epicure Mammon, for all his wealth of sensual imagination and voluptuous eloquence, for all his living play of humour and glowing force of faith, is essentially but a poor creature when set beside the great Venetian. Had the study of Tiberius been informed and vivified by something of the same fervour, the tragedy of *Sejanus* might have had in it some heat of more than merely literary life. But this lesser excellence, the merit of vigorous and vigilant devotion or application to a high and serious object of literary labour, is apparent in every scene of the tragedy. That the subject is one absolutely devoid of all but historical and literary interest—that not one of these scenes can excite for one instant the least touch, the least phantom, the least shadow of pity or terror—would apparently have seemed to its author no argu-



ment against its claim to greatness as a tragic poem. But if it could be admitted, as it will never be by any unpervverted judgment, that this eternal canon of tragic art, the law which defines terror and pity as its only proper objects, the alpha and omega of its aim and its design, may ever be disregarded or ignored, we should likewise have to admit that Jonson had in this instance achieved a success as notable as we must otherwise consider his failure. For the accusation of weakness in moral design, of feeble or unnatural treatment of character, cannot with any show of justice be brought against him. Coleridge, whose judgment on a question of ethics will scarcely be allowed to carry as much weight as his authority on matters of imagination, objects with some vehemence to the incredible inconsistency of *Sejanus* in appealing for a sign to the divinity whose altar he proceeds to overthrow, whose power he proceeds to defy, on the appearance of an unfavourable presage. This doubtless is not the conduct of a strong man or a rational thinker: but the great minister of Tiberius is never for an instant throughout the whole course of the action represented as a man of any genuine strength or any solid intelligence. He is shown to us as merely a cunning, daring, unscrupulous and imperious upstart, whose greed and craft, impudence and audacity, intoxicate while they incite and undermine while they uplift him.

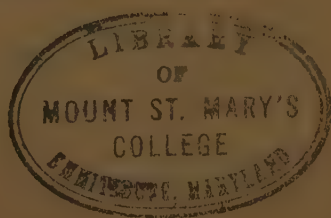
The year which witnessed the appearance of *Sejanus* on the stage—acclaimed by Chapman at greater length if not with greater fervour than by any other of Jonson's friends or satellites—witnessed also the first appearance of its author in a character which undoubtedly gave free play to some of his most remarkable abilities, but which unquestionably diverted and distorted and

absorbed his genius as a dramatist and his talent as a poet after a fashion which no capable student can contemplate without admiration or consider without regret. The few readers whose patient energy and conscientious curiosity may have led them to traverse—a pilgrimage more painful than Dante's or than Bunyan's—the entire record of the 'Entertainment' which escorted and delayed, at so many successive stations, the progress through London and Westminster of the long-suffering son of Mary Queen of Scots, will probably agree that of the two poetic dialogues or eclogues contributed by Jonson to the metrical part of the ceremony, the dialogue of the Genius and the Flamen is better than that of the Genius and Thamesis; more smooth, more vigorous, and more original. The subsequent prophecy of Electra is at all points unlike the prophecies of a Cassandra: there is something doubly tragic in the irony of chance which put into the mouth of Agamemnon's daughter a prophecy of good fortune to the royal house of Stuart on its first entrance into the capital and ascension to the throne of England. The subsequent *Panegyre* is justly praised by Gifford for its manly and dignified style of official compliment—courtliness untainted by servility: but the style is rather that of fine prose, sedately and sedulously measured and modulated, than that of even ceremonial poetry.

In the same energetic year of his literary life the Laureate produced one of his best minor works—*The Satyr*, a little lyric drama so bright and light and sweet in fancy and in finish of execution that we cannot grudge the expenditure of time and genius on so slight a subject. *The Penates*, which appeared in the following year, gave evidence again of the strong and lively

fancy which was to be but too often exercised in the same field of ingenious and pliant invention. The metre is well conceived and gracefully arranged, worthy indeed of nobler words than those which it clothes with light and pleasant melody. The octosyllabics, it will be observed by metrical students, are certainly good, but decidedly not faultless : the burlesque part sustained by Pan is equally dexterous and brilliant in execution.

In 1605 the singular and magnificent coalition of powers which served to build up the composite genius of Jonson displayed in a single masterpiece the consummate and crowning result of its marvellous energies. No other of even his very greatest works is at once so admirable and so enjoyable. The construction or composition of *The Alchemist* is perhaps more wonderful in the perfection and combination of cumulative detail, in triumphant simplicity of process and impeccable felicity of result : but there is in *Volpone* a touch of something like imagination, a savour of something like romance, which gives a higher tone to the style and a deeper interest to the action. The chief agents are indeed what Mr. Carlyle would have called 'unspeakably unexemplary mortals' : but the serious fervour and passionate intensity of their resolute and resourceful wickedness give somewhat of a lurid and distorted dignity to the display of their doings and sufferings, which is wanting to the less gigantic and heroic villainies of Subtle, Dol, and Face. The absolutely unqualified and unrelieved rascality of every agent in the later comedy—unless an exception should be made in favour of the unfortunate though enterprising Surly—is another note of inferiority ; a mark of comparative baseness in the dramatic metal. In *Volpone* the tone of villainy



and the tone of virtue are alike higher. Celia is a harmless lady, if a too submissive consort; Bonario is an honourable gentleman, if too dutiful a son. The Puritan and shopkeeping scoundrels who are swindled by Face and plundered by Lovewit are viler if less villainous figures than the rapacious victims of Volpone.

As to the respective rank or comparative excellence of these two triumphant and transcendent masterpieces, the critic who should take upon himself to pass sentence or pronounce judgment would in my opinion display more audacity than discretion. The steadfast and imperturbable skill of hand which has woven so many threads of incident, so many shades of character, so many changes of intrigue, into so perfect and superb a pattern of incomparable art as dazzles and delights the reader of *The Alchemist* is unquestionably unique—above comparison with any later or earlier example of kindred genius in the whole range of comedy, if not in the whole world of fiction. The manifold harmony of inventive combination and imaginative contrast—the multitudinous unity of various and concordant effects—the complexity and the simplicity of action and impression, which hardly allow the reader's mind to hesitate between enjoyment and astonishment, laughter and wonder, admiration and diversion—all the distinctive qualities which the alchemic cunning of the poet has fused together in the crucible of dramatic satire for the production of a flawless work of art, have given us the most perfect model of imaginative realism and satirical comedy that the world has ever seen; the most wonderful work of its kind that can ever be run upon the same lines. Nor is it possible to resist a certain sense of immoral sympathy and humorous congratulation, more

keen than any Scapin or Mascarille can awake in the mind of a virtuous reader, when Face dismisses Surly with a promise to bring him word to his lodging if he can hear of 'that Face' whom Surly has sworn to mark for his if ever he meets him. From the date of Plautus to the date of Sheridan it would surely be difficult to find in any comedy a touch of glorious impudence which might reasonably be set against this. And the whole part is so full of brilliant and effective and harmonious touches or strokes of character or of humour that even this crowning instance of serene inspiration in the line of superhuman audacity seems merely right and simply natural.

And yet, even while possessed and overmastered by the sense of the incomparable energy, the impeccable skill, and the indefatigable craftsmanship, which combined and conspired together to produce this æsthetically blameless masterpiece, the reader whose instinct requires something more than merely intellectual or æsthetic satisfaction must recognise even here the quality which distinguishes the genius of Ben Jonson from that of the very greatest imaginative humorists—Aristophanes or Rabelais, Shakespeare or Sterne, Vanbrugh or Dickens, Congreve or Thackeray. Each of these was evidently capable of falling in love with his own fancy—of rejoicing in his own imaginative humour as a swimmer in the waves he plays with: but this buoyant and passionate rapture was controlled by an instinctive sense which forbade them to strike out too far or follow the tide too long. However quaint or queer, however typical or exceptional, the figure presented may be—Olivia's or Tristram Shandy's uncle Toby, Sir John Brute or Mr. Peggotty, Lady Wishfort or Lady Kew—we recognise and accept them as lifelike and actual intimates whose



acquaintance has been made for life. Sir Sampson Legend might undoubtedly find himself as much out of place in the drawing-room of the Countess Dowager of Kew as did Sir Wilful Witwoud, on a memorable occasion, in the saloon of his aunt Lady Wishfort : Captain Toby Shandy could hardly have been expected to tolerate the Rabelaisian effervescences of Sir Toby Belch : and Vanbrugh's typical ruffians of rank have little apparently in common with Dickens's representative heroes of the poor. But in all these immortal figures there is the lifeblood of eternal life which can only be infused by the sympathetic faith of the creator in his creature—the breath which animates every word, even if the word be not the very best word that might have been found, with the vital impulse of infallible imagination. But it is difficult to believe that Ben Jonson can have believed, even with some half sympathetic and half sardonic belief, in all the leading figures of his invention. Scorn and indignation are but too often the motives or the mainsprings of his comic art ; and when dramatic poetry can exist on the sterile and fiery diet of scorn and indignation, we may hope to find life sustained in happiness and health on a diet of aperients and emetics. The one great modern master of analytic art is somewhat humaner than Jonson in the application of his scientific method to the purpose of dramatic satire. The study of *Sludge* is finer and subtler by far than the study of *Subtle* ; though undoubtedly it is, in consequence of that very perfection and sublimation of exhaustive analysis, less available for any but a monodramatic purpose. No excuse, no plea, no pretext beyond the fact of esurience and the sense of ability, is suggested for the villainy of *Subtle*, *Dol*, and *Face*. But if we were to see what might



possibly be said in extenuation of their rogueries, to hear what might possibly be pleaded in explanation or condonation of their lives, the comedy would fall through and go to pieces : the dramatic effect would collapse and be dissolved. And to this great, single, æsthetic end of art the consummate and conscientious artist who created these immortal figures was content to subdue or to sacrifice all other and subordinate considerations. Coleridge, as no reader will probably need to be reminded, 'thought the *Ædipus Tyrannus*, *The Alchemist*, and *Tom Jones*, the three most perfect plots ever planned.' With the warmest admiration and appreciation of Fielding's noble and immortal masterpiece, I cannot think it at all worthy of comparison, for blameless ingenuity of composition and absolute impeccability of design, with the greatest of tragic and the greatest of comic triumphs in construction ever accomplished by the most consummate and the most conscientious among ancient and modern artists. And when we remember that this perfection of triumphant art is exhibited, not on the scale of an ordinary comedy, whether classic or romantic, comprising a few definite types and a few impressive situations, but on a scale of invention so vast and so various as to comprise in the course of a single play as many characters and as many incidents, all perfectly adjusted and naturally developed out of each other, as would amply suffice for the entire dramatic furniture, for the entire poetic equipment, of a great dramatic poet, we feel that Gifford's expression, a 'prodigy of human intellect,' is equally applicable to *The Fox* and to *The Alchemist*, and is not a whit too strong a term for either. Nor can I admit, as I cannot discern, the blemish or imperfection which others have alleged that they descry in the composition of *Volpone*—the

unlikelihood of the device by which retribution is brought down in the fifth act on the criminals who were left at the close of the fourth act in impregnable security and triumph. So far from regarding the comic Nemesis or rather Ate which infatuates and impels Volpone to his doom as a sacrifice of art to morality, an immolation of probability and consistency on the altar of poetic justice, I admire as a master-stroke of character the haughty audacity of caprice which produces or evolves his ruin out of his own hardihood and insolence of exulting and daring enjoyment. For there is something throughout of the lion as well as of the fox in this original and incomparable figure. I know not where to find a third instance of catastrophe comparable with that of either *The Fox* or *The Alchemist* in the whole range of the highest comedy; whether for completeness, for propriety, for interest, for ingenious felicity of event or for perfect combination and exposition of all the leading characters at once in supreme simplicity, unity, and fullness of culminating effect.

And only in the author's two great farces shall we find so vast a range and variety of characters. The foolish and famous couplet of doggerel rhyme which brackets *The Silent Woman* with *The Fox* and *The Alchemist* is liable to prejudice the reader against a work which if compared with those marvellous masterpieces must needs seem to lose its natural rights to notice, to forfeit its actual claim on our rational admiration. Its proper place is not with these, but beside its fellow example of exuberant, elaborate, and deliberately farcical realism—*Bartholomew Fair*. And the two are not less wonderful in their own way, less triumphant on their own lines, than those two crowning examples of comedy.

Farcical in construction and in action, they belong to the province of the higher form of art by virtue of their leading characters. Morose indeed, as a victimised monomaniac, is rather a figure of farce than of comedy : Captain Otter and his termagant are characters of comedy rather broad than high : but the collegiate ladies, in their matchless mixture of pretension and profligacy, hypocrisy and pedantry, recall rather the comedies than the farces of Molière by the elaborate and vivid precision of portraiture which presents them in such perfect finish, with such vigour and veracity of effect. Again, if *Bartholomew Fair* is mere farce in many of its minor characters and in some of its grosser episodes and details, the immortal figure of Rabbi Busy belongs to the highest order of comedy. In that absolute and complete incarnation of Puritanism full justice is done to the merits while full justice is done upon the demerits of the barbarian sect from whose inherited and infectious tyranny this nation is as yet but imperfectly delivered. Brother Zeal-of-the-Land is no vulgar impostor, no mere religious quacksalver of such a kind as supplies the common food for satire, the common fuel of ridicule : he is a hypocrite of the earnest kind, an Ironside among civilians ; and the very abstinence of his creator from Hudibrastic misrepresentation and caricature makes the satire more thoroughly effective than all that Butler's exuberance of wit and prodigality of intellect could accomplish. The snuffling glutton who begins by exciting our laughter ends by displaying a comic perversity of stoicism in the stocks which is at least more respectable if not less laughable than the complacency of Justice Overdo, the fatuity of poor Cokes, the humble jocosity of a Littlewit, or the intemperate devotion of a Waspe. Hypocrisy

streaked with sincerity, greed with a cross of earnestness and craft with a dash of fortitude, combine to make of the Rabbi at once the funniest, the fairest, and the faithfulest study ever taken of a less despicable than detestable type of fanatic.

Not only was the genius of Jonson too great, but his character was too radically noble for a realist or naturalist of the meaner sort. It is only in the minor parts of his gigantic work, only in its insignificant or superfluous components or details, that we find a tedious insistence on wearisome or offensive topics of inartistic satire or ineffectual display. Nor is it upon the ignoble sides of character that this great satiric dramatist prefers to concentrate his attention. As even in the most terrible masterpieces of Balzac, it is not the wickedness of the vicious or criminal agents, it is their energy of intellect, their dauntless versatility of daring, their invincible fertility of resource, for which our interest is claimed or by which our admiration is aroused. In *Face* as in *Subtle*, in *Volpone* as in *Mosca*, the qualities which delight us are virtues misapplied: it is not their cunning, their avarice, or their lust, it is their courage, their genius, and their wit in which we take no ignoble or irrational pleasure. And indeed it would be strange and incongruous if a great satirist who was also a great poet had erred so grossly as not to aim at this result, or had fallen so grievously short of his aim as not to vindicate the dignity of his design. The same year in which the stage first echoed the majestic accents of *Volpone's* opening speech was distinguished by the appearance of the *Masque of Blackness*: a work eminent even among its author's in splendour of fancy, invention, and flowing eloquence. Its companion or counterpart, the *Masque of Beauty*, a poem

even more notable for these qualities than its precursor, did not appear till three years later. Its brilliant and picturesque variations on the previous theme afford a perfect example of poetic as distinct from prosaic ingenuity.

Between the dates of these two masques, which were first printed and published together, three other entertainments had employed the energetic genius of the Laureate on the double task of scenical invention and literary decoration. The first occasion was that famous visit of King Christian and his hard-drinking Danes which is patriotically supposed to have done so much harm to the proverbially sober and abstemious nation whose temperance is so vividly depicted by the enthusiastic cordiality of Iago. The *Entertainment of Two Kings at Theobalds* opens well, with two vigorous and sonorous couplets of welcome: but the Latin verses are hardly worthy of Gifford's too fervid commendation. The mock marriage of the boyish Earl of Essex and the girl afterwards known to ill fame as Countess of Somerset gave occasion of which Jonson availed himself to the full for massive display of antiquarian magnificence and indefatigable prodigality of inexhaustible detail. The epithalamium of these quasi-nuptials is fine—when it is not coarse (we cannot away, for instance, with the comparison, in serious poetry, of kisses to—cockles!): but the exuberant enthusiasm of Gifford for 'this chaste and beautiful gem' is liable to provoke in the reader's mind a comparison 'with the divine original': and among the very few poets who could sustain a comparison with Catullus no man capable of learning the merest rudiments of poetry will affirm that Ben Jonson can be ranked. His verses are smooth and strong, 'well-torned and true-filed': but the



matchless magic, the impeccable inspiration, the grace, the music, the simple and spontaneous perfection of the Latin poem, he could pretend neither to rival nor to reproduce. 'What was my part,' says Jonson in a note, 'the faults here, as well as the virtues, must speak.' These are the concluding words of a most generous and cordial tribute to the merits of the mechanist or stage-carpenter, the musician, and the dancing-master—Inigo Jones, Alfonso Ferrabosco, and Thomas Giles—who were employed on the composition of this magnificent if ill-omened pageant: and they may very reasonably be applied to the two translations from Catullus which the poet—certainly no prophet on this particular occasion—thought fit to introduce into the ceremonial verse of the masques held on the first and second nights of these star-crossed festivities. The faults and the virtues, the vigour of phrase and the accuracy of rendering, the stiffness of expression and the slowness of movement, are unmistakably characteristic of the workman. But in the second night's masque it must be noted that the original verse is distinctly better than the translated stanzas: the dispute of Truth and Opinion is a singularly spirited and vigorous example of amœbæan allegory. In the next year's *Entertainment* of the king and queen at Theobalds, then ceded by its owner to the king, the happy simplicity of invention and arrangement is worthily seconded or supported by the grave and dignified music of the elegiac verse which welcomes the coming and speeds the parting master. Next year the *Masque of Beauty* and the masque at Lord Haddington's marriage, each containing some of Jonson's finest and most flowing verse, bore equal witness to the energy and to the elasticity of his genius for apt and varied invention.

The amœbæan stanzas in the later of these two masques have more freedom of movement and spontaneity of music than will perhaps be found in any other poem of equal length from the same indefatigable hand. The fourth of these stanzas is simply magnificent : the loveliness of the next is impaired by that anatomical particularity which too often defaces the serious verse of Jonson with grotesque if not gross deformity of detail. No other poet, except possibly one of his spiritual sons, too surely ' sealed of the tribe of Ben,' would have introduced ' liver ' and ' lights ' into a sweet and graceful effusion of lyric fancy, good alike in form and sound ; a commendation not always nor indeed very frequently deserved by the verse of its author. The variations in the burden of ' Hymen's war ' are singularly delicate and happy.

The next was a memorable year in the literary life of Ben Jonson : it witnessed the appearance both of the magnificent *Masque of Queens* and of the famous comedy or farce of *The Silent Woman*. The marvellously vivid and dexterous application of marvellous learning and labour which distinguishes the most splendid of all masques as one of the typically splendid monuments or trophies of English literature has apparently eclipsed, in the appreciation of the general student, that equally admirable fervour of commanding fancy which informs the whole design and gives life to every detail. The interlude of the witches is so royally lavish in its wealth and variety of fertile and lively horror that on a first reading the student may probably do less than justice to the lofty and temperate eloquence of the noble verse and the noble prose which follow.

Of *The Silent Woman* it is not easy to say anything new and true. Its merits are salient and superb : the

combination of parts and the accumulation of incidents are so skilfully arranged and so powerfully designed that the result is in its own way incomparable—or comparable only with other works of the master's hand while yet in the fullness of its cunning and the freshness of its strength. But a play of this kind must inevitably challenge a comparison, in the judgment of modern readers, between its author and Molière : and Jonson can hardly, on the whole, sustain that most perilous comparison. It is true that there is matter enough in Jonson's play to have furnished forth two or three of Molière's : and that on that ground—on the score of industrious intelligence and laborious versatility of humour—*The Silent Woman* is as superior to the *Misanthrope* and the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* as to *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. But even when most dazzled by the splendour of studied wit and the felicity of deliberate humour which may even yet explain the extraordinary popularity or reputation of this most imperial and elaborate of all farces, we feel that the author could no more have rivalled the author of *Twelfth Night* than he could have rivalled the author of *Othello*. The Nemesis of the satirist is upon him : he cannot be simply at ease : he cannot be happy in his work without some undertone of sarcasm, some after-thought of allusion, aimed at matters which Molière would have reserved for a slighter style of satire, and which Shakespeare would scarcely have condescended to recognise as possible objects of even momentary attention. His wit is wonderful—admirable, laughable, laudable—it is not in the fullest and the deepest sense delightful. It is radically cruel, contemptuous, intolerant ; the sneer of the superior person—Dauphine or Clerimont—is always ready to pass into a snarl :

there is something in this great classic writer of the bull-baiting or bear-baiting brutality of his age. We put down *The Fox* or *The Alchemist* with a sense of wondering admiration, hardly affected by the impression of some occasional superfluity or excess : we lay aside *The Silent Woman*, not indeed without grateful recollection of much cordial enjoyment, but with distinct if reluctant conviction that the generous table at which we have been so prodigally entertained was more than a little crowded and overloaded with multifarious if savoury encumbrance of dishes. And if, as was Gifford's opinion, Shakespeare took a hint from the mock duellists in this comedy for the mock duellists in *Twelfth Night*, how wonderfully has he improved on his model ! The broad rude humour of Jonson's practical joke is boyishly brutal in the horseplay of its violence : the sweet bright fun of Shakespeare's is in perfect keeping with the purer air of the sunnier climate it thrives in. The divine good-nature, the godlike good-humour of Shakespeare can never be quite perfectly appreciated till we compare his playfulness or his merriment with other men's. Even that of Aristophanes seems to smack of the barbarian beside it.

I cannot but fear that to thorough-going Jonsonians my remarks on the great comedy in which Dryden found the highest perfection of dramatic art on record may seem inadequate if not inappreciative. But to do it anything like justice would take up more space than I can spare : it would indeed, like most of Jonson's other successful plays, demand a separate study of some length and elaboration. The high comedy of the collegiate ladies, the low comedy of Captain and Mrs. Otter, the braggart knights and the Latinist barber, are all as masterly as the versions of Ovid's

elegiacs into prose dialogue are tedious in their ingenuity and profitless in their skill. As to the chief character—who must evidently have been a native of Ecclefechan—he is as superior to the *malade imaginaire*, or to any of the Sganarelles of Molière, as is Molière himself to Jonson in lightness of spontaneous movement and easy grace of inspiration. And this is perhaps the only play of Jonson's which will keep the reader or spectator for whole scenes together in an inward riot or an open passion of subdued or unrepressed laughter.

The speeches at Prince Henry's Barriers, written by the Laureate for the occasion of the heir apparent's investiture as Prince of Wales, are noticeable for their fine and dexterous fusion of legend with history in eloquent and weighty verse. But the *Masque of Oberon*, presented the day before the tournament in which the prince bore himself so gallantly as to excite 'the great wonder of the beholders,' is memorable for a quality far higher than this: it is unsurpassed if not unequalled by any other work of its author for brightness and lightness and grace of fancy, for lyric movement and happy simplicity of expression.

Such work, however, was but the byplay in which the genius of this indefatigable poet found its natural relaxation during the year which gave to the world for all time a gift so munificent as that of *The Alchemist*. This 'unequalled play,' as it was called by contemporary admirers, was not miscalled by their enthusiasm; it is in some respects unparalleled among all the existing masterpieces of comedy. No student worthy of the name who may agree with me in preferring *The Fox* to *The Alchemist* will wish to enforce his preference upon others. Such perfection of plot, with such multiplicity of characters—such ingenuity



of incident, with such harmony of construction—can be matched, we may surely venture to say, nowhere in the whole vast range of comic invention—nowhere in the whole wide world of dramatic fiction. If the interest is less poignant than in *Volpone*, the fun less continuous than in *The Silent Woman*, the action less simple and spontaneous than that of *Every Man in his Humour*, the vein of comedy is even richer than in any of these other masterpieces. The great Sir Epicure is enough in himself to immortalise the glory of the great artist who conceived and achieved a design so fresh, so daring, so colossal in its humour as that of this magnificent character. And there are at least nine others in the play as perfect in drawing, as vivid in outline, as living in every limb and every feature, as even his whose poetic stature overtops them all. The deathless three confederates, Kastrill and Surly, Dapper and Drugger, the too perennial Puritans whose villainous whine of purity and hypocrisy has its living echoes even now—not a figure among them could have been carved or coloured by any other hand.

Nor is the list even yet complete of Jonson's poetic work during this truly wonderful year of his literary life. At Christmas he produced 'the Queen's Majesty's masque' of *Love freed from Ignorance and Folly*; a little dramatic poem composed in his lightest and softest vein of fancy, brilliant and melodious throughout. The mighty and majestic Poet Laureate would hardly, I fear, have accepted with benignity the tribute of a compliment to the effect that his use of the sweet and simple heptasyllabic metre was worthy of Richard Barnfield or George Wither: but it is certain that in purity and fluency of music his verse can seldom be compared, as here it justly may, with the clear flutelike notes of *Cynthia* and *The Shepherd's*

*Hunting*. An absurd misprint in the last line but three has afflicted all Jonson's editors with unaccountable perplexity. 'Then, then, angry music sound,' sings the chorus at the close of a song in honour of 'gentle Love and Beauty.' It is inconceivable that no one should yet have discovered the obvious solution of so slight but unfortunate an error in the type as the substitution of 'angry' for 'airy.'

The tragedy of *Catiline his Conspiracy* gave evidence in the following year that the author of *Sejanus* could do better, but could not do much better, on the same rigid lines of rhetorical and studious work which he had followed in the earlier play. Fine as is the opening of this too laborious tragedy, the stately verse has less of dramatic movement than of such as might be proper—if such a thing could be—for epic satire cast into the form of dialogue. Catiline is so mere a monster of ravenous malignity and irrational atrocity that he simply impresses us as an irresponsible though criminal lunatic : and there is something so preposterous, so abnormal, in the conduct and language of all concerned in his conspiracy, that nothing attributed to them seems either rationally credible or logically incredible. Coleridge, in his notes on the first act of this play, expresses his conviction that one passage must surely have fallen into the wrong place—such action at such a moment being impossible for any human creature. But the whole atmosphere is unreal, the whole action unnatural : no one thing said or done is less unlike the truth of life than any other : the writing is immeasurably better than the style of the ranting tragedian Seneca, but the treatment of character is hardly more serious as a study of humanity than his. In fact, what we find here is exactly what we find in the least successful of Jonson's comedies :

a study, not of humanity, but of humours. The bloody humour of Cethegus, the braggart humour of Curius, the sluggish humour of Lentulus, the swaggering humour of Catiline himself—a huffcap hero as ever mouthed and strutted out his hour on the stage—all these alike fall under the famous definition of his favourite phrase which the poet had given twelve years before in the induction to the second of his acknowledged comedies. And a tragedy of humours is hardly less than a monster in nature—or rather in that art which ‘itself is nature.’ Otherwise the second act must be pronounced excellent: the humours of the rival harlots, the masculine ambition of Sempronia, the caprices and cajoleries of Fulvia, are drawn with Jonson’s most self-conscious care and skill. But the part of Cicero is burden enough to stifle any play: and some even of the finest passages, such as the much-praised description of the dying Catiline, fine though they be, are not good in the stricter sense of the word; the rhetorical sublimity of their diction comes most perilously near the verge of bombast. Altogether, the play is another magnificent mistake: and each time we open or close it we find it more difficult to believe that the additions made by its author some ten years before to *The Spanish Tragedy* can possibly have been those printed in the later issues of that famous play.<sup>1</sup> Their subtle and spontaneous notes of nature, their profound and searching pathos,

<sup>1</sup> No student will need to be reminded of what is apparently unknown to some writers who have thought fit to offer an opinion on this subject—that different additions were made at different dates, and by different hands, to certain popular plays of the time. The original *Faustus* of Marlowe was altered and re-altered, at least three times, by three if not more purveyors of interpolated and incongruous matter: and even that superb masterpiece would hardly seem to have rivalled the popularity of Kyd’s tragedy—a popularity by no means unmerited.

their strange and thrilling tone of reality, the beauty and the terror and the truth of every touch, are the signs of a great, a very great tragic poet : and it is all but unimaginable that such an one could have been, but a year or so afterwards, the author of *Sejanus*—and again, eight years later, the author of *Catiline*. There is fine occasional writing in each, but it is not dramatic : and there is good dramatic work in each, but it is not tragic.

For two years after the appearance of *Catiline* there is an interval of silence and inaction in the literary life of its author ; an intermission of labour which we cannot pretend to explain in the case of this Herculean workman, who seems usually to have taken an austere and strenuous delight in the employment and exhibition of his colossal energies. His next work is one of which it seems all but impossible for criticism to speak with neither more nor less than justice. Gifford himself, the most devoted of editors and of partisans, to whom all serious students of Jonson owe a tribute of gratitude and respect, seems to have wavered in his judgment on this point to a quite unaccountable degree. In his memoirs of Ben Jonson *Bartholomew Fair* is described as ‘ a popular piece, but chiefly remarkable for the obloquy to which it has given birth.’ In his final note on the play, he expresses an opinion that it has ‘ not unjustly ’ been considered as ‘ nearly on a level with those exquisite dramas, *The Fox* and *The Alchemist*.’ Who shall decide when not only do doctors disagree, but the most self-confident of doctors in criticism disagrees with himself to so singular an extent ? The dainty palate of Leigh Hunt was naturally nauseated by the undoubtedly greasy flavour of the dramatic viands here served up in such prodigality of profusion : and it must be confessed that

some of the meat is too high and some of the sauces are too rank for any but a very strong digestion. But those who turn away from the table in sheer disgust at the coarseness of the fare will lose the enjoyment of some of the richest and strongest humour, some of the most brilliant and varied realism, that ever claimed the attention or excited the admiration of the study or the stage. That 'superlunatical hypocrite,' the immortal and only too immortal Rabbi Busy, towers above the minor characters of the play as the execrable fanaticism which he typifies and embodies was destined to tower above reason and humanity, charity and common sense, in its future influence on the social life of England. But in sheer force and fidelity of presentation this wonderful study from nature can hardly be said to exceed the others which surround and set it off; the dotard Littlewit, the booby Cokes, the petulant fidelity and pig-headed self-confidence of Waspe, the various humours and more various villainies of the multitudinous and riotous subordinates; above all, that enterprising and intelligent champion of social purity, the conscientious and clear-sighted Justice Adam Overdo. When all is said that can reasonably be said against the too accurate reproduction and the too voluminous exposition of vulgar and vicious nature in this enormous and multitudinous pageant—too serious in its satire and too various in its movement for a farce, too farcical in its incidents and too violent in its horseplay for a comedy—the delightful humour of its finer scenes, the wonderful vigour and veracity of the whole, the unsurpassed ingenuity and dexterity of the composition, the energy, harmony, and versatility of the action, must be admitted to ensure its place for ever among the minor and coarser masterpieces of comic art.



The masque of *Love Restored*, to which no date is assigned by the author or his editors, has some noticeable qualities in common with the play which has just been considered, and ought perhaps to have taken precedence of it in our descriptive catalogue. Robin Goodfellow's adventures at court are described with such realistic as well as fantastic humour that his narrative might have made part of the incidents or episodes of the Fair without any impropriety or incongruity; but the lyric fancy and the spirited allegory which enliven this delightful little miniature of a play make it more heartily and more simply enjoyable than many or indeed than most of its author's works. Three other masques were certainly produced during the course of the year 1614. *A Challenge at Tilt at a Marriage*, which was produced eight years after the *Masque of Hymen*, opened the new year with a superb display in honour of the second nuptials of the lady whose previous marriage, now cancelled as a nullity, had been acclaimed by the poet with such superfluous munificence of congratulation and of augury as might have made him hesitate, or at least might make us wish that he had seen fit to hesitate, before undertaking the celebration of the bride's remarriage—even had it not been made infamously memorable by association with matters less familiar to England at any time than to Rome under Pope Alexander VI. or to Paris under Queen Catherine de' Medici. But from the literary point of view, as distinguished from the ethical or the historical, we have less reason to regret than to rejoice in so graceful an example of the poet's abilities as a writer of bright, facile, ingenious and exquisite prose. *The Irish Masque*, presented four days later, may doubtless have been written with no sarcastic intention; but

if there was really no such under-current of suggestion or intimation designed or imagined by the writer, we can only find a still keener savour of satire, a still clearer indication of insight, in the characteristic representation of a province whose typical champions fall to wrangling and exchange of reciprocal insults over the display of their ruffianly devotion: while there is not merely a tone of official rebuke or courtly compliment, but a note of genuine good feeling and serious good sense, in the fine solid blank verse delivered by 'a civil gentleman of the nation.' On Twelfth Night the comic masque of *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists* gave evidence that the creator of Subtle had not exhausted his arsenal of ridicule, but had yet some shafts of satire left for the professors of Subtle's art or mystery. The humour here is somewhat elaborate, though unquestionably spirited and ingenious.

The next year's is again a blank record; but the year 1616, though to us more mournfully memorable for the timeless death of Shakespeare, is also for the student of Ben Jonson a date of exceptional importance and interest. The production of two masques and a comedy in verse, with the publication of the magnificent first edition of his collected plays and poems, must have kept his name more continuously if not more vividly before the world than in any preceding year of his literary life. The masque of *The Golden Age Restored*, presented on New Year's Night and again on Twelfth Night, is equally ingenious and equally spirited in its happy simplicity of construction and in the vigorous fluency of its versification; which is generally smooth, and in the lyrical dialogue from after the first dance to the close may fairly be called sweet; an epithet very seldom applicable

to the solid and polished verse of Jonson. And if *The Devil is an Ass* cannot be ranked among the crowning masterpieces of its author, it is not because the play shows any sign of decadence in literary power or in humorous invention: the writing is admirable, the wealth of comic matter is only too copious, the characters are as firm in outline and as rich in colour as any but the most triumphant examples of his satirical or sympathetic skill in finished delineation and demarcation of humours. On the other hand, it is of all Ben Jonson's comedies since the date of *Cynthia's Revels* the most obsolete in subject of satire, the most temporary in its allusions and applications: the want of fusion or even connection (except of the most mechanical or casual kind) between the various parts of its structure and the alternate topics of its ridicule makes the action more difficult to follow than that of many more complicated plots: and, finally, the admixture of serious sentiment and noble emotion is not so skilfully managed as to evade the imputation of incongruity. Nevertheless, there are touches in the dialogue between Lady Tailbush and Lady Eitherside in the first scene of the fourth act which are worthy of Molière himself, and suggestive of the method and the genius to which we owe the immortal enjoyment derived from the society of Cathos and Madelon—I should say, Polixène and Aminte, of Célimène and Arsinoé, and of Philaminte and Bélise. The third scene of the same act is so nobly written that the reader may feel half inclined to condone or to forget the previous humiliation of the too compliant heroine—her servile and undignified submission to the infamous imbecility of her husband—in admiration of the noble and natural eloquence with which the poet has here endowed her. But

this husband, comical as are the scenes in which he develops and dilates from the part of a dupe to the part of an impostor, is a figure almost too loathsome to be ludicrous—or at least, however ludicrous, to be fit for the leading part in a comedy of ethics as well as of manners. And the prodigality of elaboration lavished on such a multitude of subordinate characters, at the expense of all continuous interest and to the sacrifice of all dramatic harmony, may tempt the reader to apostrophise the poet in his own words :—

You are so covetous still to embrace  
More than you can, that you lose all.

Yet a word of parting praise must be given to Satan : a small part as far as extent goes, but a splendid example of high comic imagination after the order of Aristophanes, admirably relieved by the low comedy of the asinine Pug and the voluble doggrel of the antiquated Vice.

Not till nine years after the appearance of this play, in which the genius of the author may be said—in familiar phraseology—to have fallen between two stools, carrying either too much suggestion of human interest for a half allegorical satire, or not enough to give actual interest to the process of the satirical allegory, did Ben Jonson produce on the stage a masterpiece of comedy in which this danger was avoided, this difficulty overcome, with absolute and triumphant facility of execution. In the meantime, however, he had produced nine masques—or ten, counting that which appeared in the same year with his last great work of comic art. The *Masque of Christmas*, which belongs to the same year as the two works last mentioned, is a comfortable little piece

of genial comic realism ; pleasant, quaint, and homely : the good-humoured humour of little Robin Cupid and his honest old mother ' Venus, a deaf tirewoman,' is more agreeable than many more studious and elaborate examples of the author's fidelity as a painter or photographer of humble life. Next year, in the masque of *Lovers made Men*, called by Gifford the *Masque of Lethe*, he gave full play to his lighter genius and lyric humour : it is a work of exceptionally simple, natural, and graceful fancy. In the following year he brought out the much-admired *Vision of Delight* ; a very fair example of his capacities and incapacities. The fanciful, smooth, and flowing verse of its graver parts would be worthy of Fletcher, were it not that the music is less fresh and pure in melody, and that among the finest and sweetest passages there are interspersed such lamentably flat and stiff couplets as would have been impossible to any other poet of equal rank. If justice has not been done in modern times to Ben Jonson as one of the greatest of dramatists and humorists, much more than justice has been done to him as a lyric poet. The famous song of Night in this masque opens and closes most beautifully and most sweetly : but two out of the eleven lines which compose it, the fifth and the sixth, are positively and intolerably bad. The barbarous and pedantic license of inversion which disfigures his best lyrics with such verses as these—' Create of airy forms a stream,' ' But might I of Jove's nectar sup '—is not a fault of the age but a vice of the poet. Marlowe and Lyly, Shakespeare and Webster, Fletcher and Dekker, could write songs as free from this blemish as Tennyson's or Shelley's. There is no surer test of the born lyric poet than the presence or absence of an instinctive sense which assures him when and



how and where to use or to abstain from inversion. And in Jonson it was utterly wanting.

The next year's masque, *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, would be very graceful in composition if it were not rather awkward in construction. The verses in praise of dancing are very pretty, sedate, and polished: and the burlesque part (spoken by 'Messer Gaster' in person) has more than usual of Rabelaisian freedom and energy. The antimasque afterwards prefixed to it, *For the Honour of Wales*, is somewhat ponderous in its jocularity, but has genuine touches of humour and serious notes of character in its 'tedious and brief' display of the poet's incomparable industry and devotion to the study of dialects and details: and the close is noble and simple in its patriotic or provincial eloquence. But in the year 1620 the comic genius of Jonson shone out once more in all the splendour of its strength. The only masque of that year, *News from the New World discovered in the Moon*, is worthy of a prose Aristophanes: in other words, it is a satire such as Aristophanes might have written, if that greater poet had ever condescended to write prose. Here for once the generous words of Jonson's noble panegyric on Shakespeare may justly be applied to himself: in his own immortal phrase, the humour of this little comedy is 'not of an age, but for all time.' At the very opening we find ourselves on but too familiar ground, and feel that the poet must have shot himself forward by sheer inspiration into our own enlightened age, when we hear 'a printer of news' avowing the notable fact that 'I do hearken after them, wherever they be, at any rates; I'll give anything for a good copy now, be it true or false, so it be news.' Are not these, the reader must ask himself, the accents of some

gutter gaolbird—some dunghill gazetteer of this very present day? Or is the avowal too honest in its impudence for such lips as these? After this, the anticipation of something like railways ('coaches' that 'go only with wind')—if not also of something like balloons ('a castle in the air that runs upon wheels, with a winged lanthorn')—seems but a commonplace example of prophetic instinct.

The longest of Ben Jonson's masques was expanded to its present bulk by the additions made at each successive representation before the king; to whose not over delicate or fastidious taste this *Masque of the Metamorphosed Gipsies* would seem to have given incomparable if not inexhaustible delight. And even those readers who may least enjoy the decidedly greasy wit or humour of some among its once most popular lyrical parts must admire and cannot but enjoy the rare and even refined loveliness of others. The fortune most unfortunately told of his future life and death to the future King Charles I. is told in the very best lyric verse that the poet could command: a strain of quite exceptional sweetness, simplicity, and purity of music: to which, as we read it now, the record of history seems to play a most tragically ironical accompaniment, in a minor key of subdued and sardonic presage. And besides these graver and lovelier interludes of poetry which relieve the somewhat obtrusive realism of the broader comic parts, this masque has other claims on our notice and remembrance; the ingenuity and dexterity, the richness of resource and the pliability of humour, which inform and animate all its lyric prophecies or compliments.

The masque which appeared in the following year is a monument of learning and labour such as no other

poet could have dreamed of lavishing on a ceremonial or official piece of work, and which can only be appreciated by careful reading and thorough study of the copious notes and references appended to the text. But the writer's fancy was at a low ebb when it could devise nothing better than is to be found in this *Masque of Augurs*: the humour is coarse and clumsy, the verses are flat and stiff. In the next year's Twelfth-Night masque, *Time vindicated to himself and to his honours*, the vigorous and vicious personalities of the attack on George Wither give some life to the part in which the author of *Abuses Stript and Whipt* is brought in under the name of Chronomastix to make mirth for the groundlings of the Court. The feeble and facile fluency of his pedestrian Muse in the least fortunate hours of her too voluble and voluminous improvisation is not unfairly caricatured; but the Laureate's malevolence is something too obvious in his ridicule of the 'soft ambling verse' whose 'rapture' at its highest has the quality denied by nature to Jonson's—the divine gift of melodious and passionate simplicity. A better and happier use for his yet unimpaired faculty of humour was found in the following year's masque of *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion*; which contains the most famous and eloquent panegyric on the art of cookery that ever anticipated the ardours of Thackeray and the enthusiasm of Dumas. The passage is a really superb example of tragicomic or mock-heroic blank verse; and in the closing lyrics of the masque there is no lack of graceful fancy and harmonious elegance. For the next year's masque of *Pan's Anniversary, or The Shepherd's Holiday*, not quite so much can reasonably be said. It is a typical and a flagrant instance of the poet's proverbial and incurable tendency to overdo

everything : there is but artificial smoothness in the verse, and but clownish ingenuity in the prose of it.

But the year 1625 is memorable to the students and admirers of Ben Jonson for the appearance of a work worth almost all his masques together ; a work in which the author of *The Fox* and *The Alchemist* once more reasserted his claim to a seat which no other poet and no other dramatist could dispute. The last complete and finished masterpiece of his genius is the splendid comedy of *The Staple of News*. This, rather than *The Silent Woman*, is the play which should be considered as the third—or perhaps we should say the fourth—of the crowning works which represent the consummate and incomparable powers of its author. No man can know anything worth knowing of Ben Jonson who has not studied and digested the text of *Every Man in his Humour*, *The Fox*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Staple of News* : but any man who has may be said to know him well. To a cursory or an incompetent reader it may appear at first sight that the damning fault of *The Devil is an Ass* is also the fault of this later comedy : that we have here again an infelicitous and an incongruous combination of realistic satire with Aristophanic allegory, and that the harmony of the different parts, the unity of the composite action, which a pupil of Aristophanes should at least have striven to attain—or, if he could not, at least to imitate and to respect—can here be considered as conspicuous only by their absence. But no careful and candid critic will retain such an impression after due study has been given to the third poetic comedy which reveals to us the genius of Jonson, not merely as a realistic artist in prose or a master of magnificent farce, but as a great comic poet. The scheme of his

last preceding comedy had been vitiated by a want of coherence between the actual and the allegorical, the fantastic and the literal point of view ; and the result was confusion without fusion of parts : here, on the other hand, we have fusion without confusion between the dramatic allegory suggested by Aristophanes, the admirably fresh and living presentation of the three Pennyboys, and the prophetic satire of the newsmarket or Stock Exchange of journalism. The competent reader will be divided between surprise at the possibility and delight in the perfection of the success achieved by a poet who has actually endowed with sufficiency of comic life and humorous reality a whole group of symbolic personifications ; from the magnificent Infanta herself, Aurelia Clara Pecunia, most gracious and generous yet most sensitive and discreet of imperial damsels, even down to little 'blushet,' Rose Wax the chambermaid. Her young suitor is at least as good a picture of a generous light-headed prodigal as ever was shown on any stage : as much of a man as Charles Surface, and very much more of a gentleman. The miserly uncle, though very well drawn, is less exceptionally well drawn : but Pennyboy Canter, the disguised father, is equally delightful from the moment of his entrance with an extempore carol of salutation on his lips to those in which he appears to rescue the misused Infanta from the neglectful favourite of her choice, and reappears at the close of the play to rescue his son, redeem his brother, and scatter the community of jeerers : to whose humour Gifford is somewhat less than just when he compares it with 'the vapouring in *Bartholomew Fair*' : for it is neither coarse nor tedious, and takes up but very little space ; and that not unamusingly. As for the great scene of the Staple, it



is one of the most masterly in ancient or modern comedy of the typical or satirical kind. The central 'Office' here opened, to the great offence (it should seem) of 'most of the spectators'—a fact which, as Gifford justly remarks, 'argues very little for the good sense of the audience'—may be regarded by a modern student as representing the narrow little nest in which was laid the modest little egg of modern journalism—that bird of many notes and many feathers, now so like an eagle and now so like a vulture : now soaring as a falcon or sailing as a pigeon over continents and battle-fields, now grovelling and groping as a dunghill kite, with its beak in a very middenstead of falsehood and of filth. The vast range of Ben Jonson's interest and observation is here as manifest as the wide scope and infinite variety of his humour. Science and warfare, Spinola and Galileo, come alike within reach of its notice, and serve alike for the material of its merriment. The invention of torpedoes is anticipated by two centuries and a half ; while in the assiduity of the newsmongers who traffic in eaves-dropping detail we acknowledge a resemblance to that estimable race of tradesmen known to Parisian accuracy as *interwieveurs*. And the lunacy of apocalyptic interpreters or prophets is gibbeted side by side with the fanatical ignorance of missionary enthusiasm, with impostures of professional quackery and speculations in personal libel. Certainly, if ever Ben deserved the prophetic title of Vates, it was in this last magnificent work of his maturest genius. Never had his style or his verse been riper or richer, more vigorous or more pure. And even the interludes in which we hear the commentary and gather the verdict of 'these ridiculous gossips' (as their creator calls them) 'who tattle between the acts' are incomparably superior

to his earlier efforts or excursions in the same field of humorous invention. The intrusive commentators on *Every Man out of his Humour*, for instance, are mere nullities—the awkward and abortive issue of unconscious uneasiness and inartistic egoism. But Expectation, Mirth, Tattle, and Censure are genuine and living sketches of natural and amusing figures: and their dialogues, for appropriate and spirited simplicity, are worthy of comparison with even those of a similar nature which we owe not more to the genius than to the assailants of Molière.

In 1625 Ben Jonson had brought out his last great comedy: in 1626 he brought out the last of his finer sort of masques. The little so-called *Masque of Owls*, which precedes it in the table of contents, is (as Gifford points out) no masque at all: it is a quaint effusion of doggrel dashed with wit and streaked with satire. But in *The Fortunate Isles, and their Union*, the humour and the verse are alike excellent: the jest on Plato's ideas would have delighted Landor, and the wish of Merefool to 'see a Brahman or a Gymnosophist' is worthy of a modern believer in esoteric Buddhism. Few if any of the masques have in them lyrics of smoother and clearer flow; and the construction is no less graceful than ingenious. The next reappearance of the poet, after a silence during three years of broken or breaking health, was so memorably unfortunate in its issue that the name and the fate of a play which was only too naturally and deservedly hooted off the stage are probably familiar to many who know nothing of the masterpiece which had last preceded it. Ever since Lamb gathered some excerpts from the more high-toned and elaborate passages of *The New Inn*, or *The Light Heart*, and

commended in them 'the poetical fancy and elegance of mind of the supposed rugged old bard,' it has been the fashion to do justice if not something more than justice to the literary qualities of this play; which no doubt contains much vigorous and some graceful writing, and may now and then amuse a tolerant reader by its accumulating and culminating absurdities of action and catastrophe, character and event. But that the work shows portentous signs of mental decay, or at all events of temporary collapse in judgment and in sense, can be questioned by no sane reader of so much as the argument. To rank any preceding play of Jonson's among those dismissed by Dryden as his 'dotages' would be to attribute to Dryden a verdict displaying the veriest imbecility of impudence: but to *The New Inn* that rough and somewhat brutal phrase is on the whole but too plausibly applicable.

At the beginning of the next year Jonson came forward in his official capacity as court poet or laureate, and produced 'the Queen's Masque,' *Love's Triumph through Callipolis*, and again, at Shrovetide, 'the King's Masque,' *Chloridia*. A few good verses, faint echoes of a former song, redeem the first of these from the condemnation of compassion or contempt: and there is still some evidence in its composition of conscientious energy and of capacity not yet reduced from the stage of decadence to the stage of collapse. But the hymn which begins fairly enough with imitation of an earlier and nobler strain of verse at once subsides into commonplace, and closes in doggerel which would have disgraced a Sylvester or a Quarles. It is impossible to read *Chloridia* without a regretful reflection on the lapse of time which prevented it from being a beautiful and typical instance of the author's

lyric power : but, however inferior it may be to what he would have made of so beautiful a subject in the freshness and fullness of his inventive and fanciful genius, it is still ingenious and effective after a fashion ; and the first song is so genuinely graceful and simple as to remind us of Wordsworth in his more pedestrian but not uninspired moods or measures of lyrical or elegiac verse.

The higher genius of Ben Jonson as a comic poet was yet once more to show itself in one brilliant flash of parting splendour before its approaching sunset. No other of his works would seem to have met with such all but universal neglect as *The Magnetic Lady* ; I do not remember to have ever seen it quoted or referred to, except once by Dryden, who in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* cites from it an example of narrative substituted for action, 'where one comes out from dinner, and relates the quarrels and disorders of it, to save the undecent appearance of them on the stage, and to abbreviate the story.' And yet any competent spectator of its opening scenes must have felt a keen satisfaction at the apparent revival of the comic power and renewal of the dramatic instinct so lamentably enfeebled and eclipsed on the last occasion of a new play from the same hand. The first act is full of brilliant satirical description and humorous analysis of humours : the commentator Compass, to whom we owe these masterly summaries of character, is an excellent counterpart of that 'reasonable man' who so constantly reappears on the stage of Molière to correct with his ridicule or control by his influence the extravagant or erratic tendencies of his associates. Very few examples of Jonson's grave and deliberate humour are finer than the ironical counsel given by Compass to the courtly fop whom he dissuades from

challenging the soldier who has insulted him, on the ground that the soldier

has killed so many  
As it is ten to one his turn is next :  
You never fought with any, less, slew any ;  
And therefore have the [fairer] hopes before you.

The rest of the speech, with all that follows to the close of the scene, is no less ripe and rich in sedate and ingenious irony. There is no less admirable humour in the previous discourse of the usurer in praise of wealth—especially as being the only real test of a man's character :—

For, be he rich, he straight with evidence knows  
Whether he have any compassion  
Or inclination unto virtue, or no :  
Where the poor knave erroneously believes  
If he were rich he would build churches, or  
Do such mad things.

Most of the characters are naturally and vigorously drawn in outline or in profile : Dame Polish is a figure well worthy the cordial and lavish commendation of Gifford : and the action is not only original and ingenious, but during the first four acts at any rate harmonious and amusing. The fifth act seems to me somewhat weaker ; but the interludes are full of spirit, good humour, and good sense.

*A Tale of a Tub*, which appeared in the following year, is a singular sample of farce elaborated and exalted into comedy. This rustic study, though 'not liked' by the king and queen when acted before them at court, has very real merits in a homely way. The list of characters looks unpromising, and reminds us to regret that the old poet could not be induced to profit by Feltham's very just and reason-



able animadversions on 'all your jests so nominal'; which deface this play no less than *The New Inn*, and repel the most tolerant reader by their formal and laborious puerility. But the action opens brightly and briskly: the dispute about 'Zin Valentine' is only less good in its way than one of George Eliot's exquisite minor touches—Mr. Dempster's derivation of the word Presbyterian from one Jack Presbyter of historic infamy: the young squire's careful and testy 'man and governor' is no unworthy younger brother of Numps in *Bartholomew Fair*: and the rustic heroine, a figure sketched with rough realistic humour, is hardly less than delightful when she remarks, after witnessing the arrest of her intended bridegroom on a charge of highway robbery, 'He might have married one first, and have been hanged after, if he had had a mind to 't'; a reflection worthy of Congreve or Vanbrugh, Miss Hoyden or Miss Prue. But Jonson had never laid to heart the wisdom expressed in the admirable proverb—'Qui trop embrasse mal étreint'; the simple subject of the play and the homely motive of the action are overlaid and overloaded by the multiplicity of minor characters and episodical superfluities, and the upshot of all the poet's really ingenious contrivances is pointless as well as farcical and flat as well as trivial. But there is certainly no sign of dotage in any work of Ben Jonson's produced before or after the lamentable date of *The New Inn*. The author apologises for the homely and rustic quality of his uncourtly play; but if it be a failure, it is not on account of its plebeian humility, but through the writer's want of any real sympathy with his characters, any hearty relish of his subject: because throughout the whole conduct of a complicated intrigue he shows himself ungenially

observant and contemptuously studious of his models : because the qualities most needed for such work, transparent lucidity and straightforward simplicity of exposition, are not to be found in these last comedies : because, for instance, as much attention is needed to appreciate the ingenious process of ' humours reconciled ' in *The Magnetic Lady*, or to follow the no less ingenious evolution of boorish rivalries and clownish intrigues in the play just noticed, as to follow the action and appreciate the design of *The Fox* or *The Alchemist*.

The masque of this year, *Love's Welcome at Welbeck*, is a thing of very slight pretensions, but not unsuccessful or undiverting after its homely fashion. In the next year's companion masque, *Love's Welcome at Bolsover*, the verse, though not wanting in grace or ease, is less remarkable than the rough personal satire on Inigo Jones ; who, it may be observed, is as ready with a quotation from Chaucer as Goody Polish in *The Magnetic Lady* or Lovel in *The New Inn*.

Of this great dramatist's other than dramatic work in poetry or in prose this is not the place to speak : and his two posthumous fragments of dramatic poetry, interesting and characteristic as they are, can hardly affect for the better or for the worse our estimate of his powers. Had *Mortimer his Fall* been completed, we should undoubtedly have had a third example of rhetorical drama, careful, conscientious, energetic, impassive and impressive ; worthy to stand beside the author's two Roman tragedies : and Mortimer might have confronted and outfaced Sejanus and Catiline in sonorous audacity of rhythmic self-assertion and triumphant ostentation of magnificent vacuity. In *The Sad Shepherd* we find the faults and the merits of his best and his worst masques

so blended and confounded that we cannot but perceive the injurious effect on the Laureate's genius or instinct of intelligence produced by the habit of conventional invention which the writing of verse to order and the arrangement of effects for a pageant had now made inevitable and incurable. A masque including an antimasque, in which the serious part is relieved and set off by the introduction of parody or burlesque, was a form of art or artificial fashion in which incongruity was a merit; the grosser the burlesque, the broader the parody, the greater was the success and the more effective was the result: but in a dramatic attempt of higher pretension than such as might be looked for in the literary groundwork or raw material for a pageant, this intrusion of incongruous contrast is a pure barbarism—a positive solecism in composition. The collocation of such names and such figures as those of Æglamour and Earine with such others as Much and Maudlin, Scathlock and Scarlet, is no whit less preposterous or less ridiculous, less inartistic or less irritating, than the conjunction in Dekker's *Satiromastix* of Peter Flash and Sir Quintillian, Sir Adam Prickshaft and Sir Vaughan ap Rees, with Crispinus and Demetrius, Asinius and Horace: and the offence is graver, more inexcusable and more inexplicable, in a work of pure fancy or imagination, than in a work of poetic invention crossed and chequered with controversial satire. Yet Gifford, who can hardly find words or occasions sufficient to express his sense of Dekker's 'inconceivable folly,' or his contempt for 'a plot that can scarcely be equalled in absurdity by the worst of the plays which Dekker was ever employed to "dress,"' has not a syllable of reprehension for the portentous incongruities of this mature and

elaborate poem. On the other hand, even Gifford's editorial enthusiasm could not overestimate the ingenious excellence of construction, the masterly harmony of composition, which every reader of the argument must have observed with such admiration as can but intensify his regret that scarcely half of the projected poem has come down to us. No work of Ben Jonson's is more amusing and agreeable to read, as none is more nobly graceful in expression or more excellent in simplicity of style.

The immense influence of this great writer on his own generation is not more evident or more memorable than is the refraction or reverberation of that influence on the next. This 'sovereign sway and masterdom,' this overpowering preponderance of reputation, could not but be and could not but pass away. No giant had ever the divine versatility of a Shakespeare: but of all the giant brood none ever showed so much diversity of power as Jonson. In no single work has he displayed such masterly variety of style as has Byron in his two great poems, *Don Juan* and *The Vision of Judgment*: the results of his attempts at mixture or fusion of poetry with farce will stand exposed in all their deformity and discrepancy if we set them beside the triumphant results of Shakespeare's. That faultless felicity of divine caprice which harmonises into such absolute congruity all the outwardly incompatible elements of such works as *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is perhaps of all Shakespeare's incomparable gifts the one most utterly beyond reach of other poets. But when we consider the various faculties and powers of Jonson's genius and intelligence, when we examine severally the divers forces and capacities enjoyed and exercised by this

giant workman in the performance of his work, we are amazed into admiration only less in its degree than we feel for the greatest among poets. It is not admiration of the same kind: there is less in it of love and worship than we give to the gods of song; but it is with deep reverence and with glowing gratitude that we salute in this Titan of the English stage 'il maestro di color che sanno.'



## II

### MISCELLANEOUS WORKS

AMONG the great dramatic poets of the Shakespearean age there are several who would still have a claim to enduring remembrance as poets, even had they never written a line for the theatre : there are two only who would hold a high rank among the masters of English prose. For Nash was not a poet or a dramatist who wandered occasionally into prose by way of change or diversion : he was a master of prose who strayed now and then into lyric or dramatic verse. Heywood, Middleton, and Ford have left us more or less curious and valuable works in prose : essays and pamphlets or chronicles and compilations : but these are works of historic interest rather than literary merit ; or, if this be too strong and sweeping an expression, they are works of less intrinsic than empirical value. But if all his plays were lost to us, the author of Ben Jonson's *Explorata, or Discoveries*, would yet retain a seat among English prose-writers beside the author of Bacon's Essays : the author of *The Gull's Horn-book* and *The Bachelor's Banquet* would still stand high in the foremost rank of English humorists.

The book of epigrams published by Jonson in the collected edition of his select works up to the date of the year 1616 is by no means an attractive introduction or an alluring prelude to the voluminous collection of miscellanies which in all modern editions

it precedes. 'It is to be lamented,' in Gifford's opinion, 'on many accounts,' that the author has not left us 'a further selection.' It is in my opinion to be deplored that he should have left us so large a selection—if that be the proper term—as he has seen fit to bequeath to a naturally and happily limited set of readers. 'Sunt bona, sunt quædam mediocria, sunt mala plura': and the worst are so bad, so foul if not so dull, so stupid if not so filthy, that the student stands aghast with astonishment at the self-deceiving capacity of a writer who could prefix to such a collection the vaunt that his book was 'not covetous of least self-fame'—'much less' prone to indulgence in 'beastly phrase.' No man can ever have been less amenable than Sir Walter Scott to the infamous charge of Puritanism or prudery; and it is he who has left on record his opinion that 'surely that coarseness of taste which tainted Ben Jonson's powerful mind is proved from his writings. Many authors of that age are indecent, but Jonson is filthy and gross in his pleasantry, and indulges himself in using the language of scavengers and nightmen.' I will only add that the evidence of this is flagrant in certain pages which I never forced myself to read through till I had undertaken to give a full and fair account—to the best of my ability—of Ben Jonson's complete works. How far poetry may be permitted to go in the line of sensual pleasure or sexual emotion may be debatable between the disciples of Ariosto and the disciples of Milton; but all English readers, I trust, will agree with me that coprology should be left to Frenchmen. Among them—that is, of course, among the baser sort of them—that unsavoury science will seemingly never lack disciples of the most nauseous, the most abject, the most deliberate bestiality. It is

nothing less than lamentable that so great an English writer as Ben Jonson should ever have taken the plunge of a Parisian diver into the cesspool : but it is as necessary to register as it is natural to deplore the detestable fact that he did so. The collection of his epigrams which bears only too noisome witness to this fact is nevertheless by no means devoid of valuable and admirable components. The sixty-fifth, a palinode or recantation of some previous panegyric, is very spirited and vigorous ; and the verses of panegyric which precede and follow it are wanting neither in force nor in point. The poem 'on Lucy Countess of Bedford,' for which Gifford seems hardly able to find words adequate to his admiration, would be worthy of very high praise if the texture of its expression and versification were unstiffened and undisfigured by the clumsy license of awkward inversions. *The New Cry*, a brief and brilliant satire on political gossips of the *gobemouche* order, has one couplet worthy of Dryden himself, descriptive of such pretenders to statecraft as

talk reserved, locked up, and full of fear,  
Nay, ask you how the day goes, in your ear ;  
*Keep a Star-chamber sentence close twelve days,*  
*And whisper what a proclamation says.*

The epitaph on little Salathiel Pavy, who had acted under his own name in the induction to *Cynthia's Revels*, is as deservedly famous as any minor work of Jonson's ; for sweetness and simplicity it has few if any equals among his lyrical attempts.

Of the fifteen lyric or elegiac poems which compose *The Forest*, there is none that is not worthy of all but the highest praise ; there is none that is worthy of the highest. To come so near so often and yet

never to touch the goal of lyric triumph has never been the fortune and the misfortune of any other poet. Vigour of thought, purity of phrase, condensed and polished rhetoric, refined and appropriate eloquence, studious and serious felicity of expression, finished and fortunate elaboration of verse, might have been considered as qualities sufficient to secure a triumph for the poet in whose work all these excellent attributes are united and displayed ; and we cannot wonder that younger men who had come within the circle of his personal influence should have thought that the combination of them all must ensure to their possessor a place above all his possible compeers. But among the humblest and most devout of these prostrate enthusiasts was one who had but to lay an idle and reckless hand on the instrument which hardly would answer the touch of his master's at all, and the very note of lyric poetry as it should be—as it was in the beginning, as it is, and as it will be for ever—responded on the instant to the instinctive intelligence of his touch. As we turn from Gray to Collins, as we turn from Wordsworth to Coleridge, as we turn from Byron to Shelley, so do we turn from Jonson to Herrick ; and so do we recognise the lyric poet as distinguished from the writer who may or may not have every gift but one in higher development of excellence and in fuller perfection of power, but who is utterly and absolutely transcended and shone down by his probably unconscious competitor on the proper and peculiar ground of pure and simple poetry.

But the special peculiarity of the case now before us is that it was so much the greater man who was distanced and eclipsed ; and this not merely by a minor poet, but by a humble admirer and a studious disciple of his own. Herrick, as a writer of elegies,

epithalamiums, panegyrical or complimentary verses, is as plainly and as openly an imitator of his model as ever was the merest parasite of any leading poet, from the days of Chaucer and his satellites to the days of Tennyson and his. No Lydgate or Lytton was ever more obsequious in his discipleship; but for all his loving and loyal protestations of passionate humility and of ardent reverence, we see at every turn, at every step, at every change of note, that what the master could not do the pupil can. When Chapman set sail after Marlowe, he went floundering and lurching in the wake of a vessel that went straight and smooth before the fullest and the fairest wind of song; but when Herrick follows Jonson the manner of movement or the method of progression is reversed. Macaulay, in a well-known passage, has spoken of Ben Jonson's 'rugged rhymes'; but rugged is not exactly the most appropriate epithet. Donne is rugged: Jonson is stiff. And if ruggedness of verse is a damaging blemish, stiffness of verse is a destructive infirmity. Ruggedness is curable; witness Donne's *Anniversaries*: stiffness is incurable; witness Jonson's *Underwoods*. In these, as in the preceding series called *The Forest*, there is so lavish a display of such various powers as cannot but excite the admiration they demand and deserve. They have every quality, their author would undoubtedly have maintained, that a student of poetry ought to expect and to applaud. What they want is that magic without which the very best verse is as far beneath the very best prose as the verse which has it is above all prose that ever was or ever can be written. And there never was a generation of Englishmen in which this magic was a gift so common as it was in Jonson's. We have but to open either of the priceless volumes which we owe to the exquisite taste and the untiring devotion of Mr. Bullen, and we



shall come upon scores after scores of 'lyrics from Elizabethan song-books' as far beyond comparison with the very best of Jonson's as Shakespeare is beyond comparison with Shirley, as Milton is beyond comparison with Glover, or as Coleridge is beyond comparison with Southey. There is exceptional ease of movement, exceptional grace of expression, in the lyric which evoked from Gifford the 'free' avowal, 'if it be not the most beautiful song in the language, I know not, for my part, where it is to be found.' Who on earth, then or now, would ever have supposed that the worthy Gifford did? But any one who does know anything more of the matter than the satirist and reviewer whose own amatory verses were 'lazy as Scheldt and cold as Don' will acknowledge that it would be difficult to enumerate the names of poets contemporary with Jonson, from Frank Davison to Robin Herrick, who have left us songs at least as beautiful as that beginning—'Oh do not wanton with those eyes, Lest I be sick with seeing.' And in 'the admirable Epode,' as Gifford calls it, which concludes Ben Jonson's contributions to *Love's Martyr*, though there is remarkable energy of expression, the irregularity and inequality of style are at least as conspicuous as the occasional vigour and the casual felicity of phrase. But if all were as good as the best passages this early poem of Jonson's would undoubtedly be very good indeed. Take for instance the description or definition of true love :—

That is an essence far more gentle, fine,<sup>1</sup>  
Pure, perfect, nay divine ;  
It is a golden chain let down from heaven,  
Whose links are bright and even,  
That falls like sleep on lovers.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the original edition, 'most gentile and fine' : a curious Italianism which must have seemed questionable or unallowable to the author's maturer taste.

Again :—

O, who is he that in this peace enjoys  
 The elixir of all joys,  
 (A form more fresh than are the Eden bowers  
 And lasting as her flowers ;  
 Richer than time, and as time's virtue rare,  
 Sober as saddest care,  
 A fixed thought, an eye untaught to glance ;)   
 Who, blest with such high chance,  
 Would at suggestion of a steep desire  
 Cast himself from the spire  
 Of all his happiness ?

And few of Jonson's many moral or gnostic passages are finer than the following :—

He that for love of goodness hateth ill  
 Is more crown-worthy still  
 Than he which for sin's penalty forbears  
 His heart sins, though he fears.

This metre, though very liable to the danger of monotony, is to my ear very pleasant ; but that of the much admired and doubtless admirable address to Sir Robert Wroth is much less so. This poem is as good and sufficient an example of the author's ability and inability as could be found in the whole range of his elegiac or lyric works. It has excellent and evident qualities of style ; energy and purity, clearness and sufficiency, simplicity and polish ; but it is wanting in charm. Grace, attraction, fascination, the typical and essential properties of verse, it has not. Were Jonson to be placed among the gods of song, we should have to say of him what Æschylus says of Death—

*μόνον δὲ Πειθᾷ δαιμόνων ἀποστατεῖ.*

The spirit of persuasive enchantment, the goddess of entrancing inspiration, kept aloof from him alone

of all his peers or rivals. To men far weaker, to poets not worthy to be named with him on the score of creative power, she gave the gift which from him was all but utterly withheld. And therefore it is that his place is not beside Shakespeare, Milton, or Shelley, but merely above Dryden, Byron, and Crabbe. The verses on Penshurst are among his best, wanting neither in grace of form nor stateliness of sound, if too surely wanting in the indefinable quality of distinction or inspiration : and the farewell to the world has a savour of George Herbert's style about it which suggests that the sacred poet must have been a sometime student of the secular. Beaumont, again, must have taken as a model of his lighter lyric style the bright and ringing verses on the proposition ' that women are but men's shadows.' The opening couplet of the striking address ' to Heaven ' has been, it seems to me, misunderstood by Gifford ; the meaning is not — ' Can I not think of God without its making me melancholy ? ' but ' Can I not think of God without its being imputed or set down by others to a fit of dejection ? ' The few sacred poems which open the posthumous collection of his miscellaneous verse are far inferior to the best of Herrick's *Noble Numbers* ; although the second of the three must probably have served the minor poet as an occasional model.

The *Celebration of Charis in ten lyric pieces* would be a graceful example of Jonson's lighter and brighter inspiration if the ten were reduced to eight. His anapæsts are actually worse than Shelley's : which hope would fain have assumed and charity would fain have believed to be impossible. ' We will take our plan from the new world of man, and our work shall be called the Pro-me-the-an '—even the hideous and excruciating cacophony of that horrible sentence is

not so utterly inconceivable as verse, is not so fearfully and wonderfully immetrical as this : ' And from her arched brows such a grace sheds itself through the face.' The wheeziest of barrel-organs, the most broken-winded of bagpipes, grinds or snorts out sweeter melody than that. But the heptasyllabic verses among which this monstrous abortion rears its amorphous head are better than might have been expected ; not, as Gifford says of one example, ' above all praise,' but creditable at their best and tolerable at their worst.

The miscellaneous verses collected under the pretty and appropriate name of *Underwoods* comprise more than a few of Ben Jonson's happiest and most finished examples of lyric, elegiac, and gnomic or didactic poetry ; and likewise not a little of such rigid and frigid work as makes us regret the too strenuous and habitual application of so devoted a literary craftsman to his professional round of labour. The fifth of these poems, *A Nymph's Passion*, is not only pretty and ingenious, but in the structure of its peculiar stanza may remind a modern reader of some among the many metrical experiments or inventions of a more exquisite and spontaneous lyric poet, Miss Christina Rossetti. The verses ' on a lover's dust, made sand for an hour-glass,' just come short of excellence in their fantastic way ; those on his picture are something more than smooth and neat ; those against jealousy are exceptionally sweet and spontaneous, again recalling the manner of the poetess just mentioned ; with a touch of something like Shelley's—

I wish the sun should shine  
On all men's fruits and flowers, as well as mine—

and also of something like George Herbert's at his best. *The Dream* is one of Jonson's most happily

inspired and most happily expressed fancies ; the close of it is for once not less than charming.

Of the various elegies and epistles included in this collection it need only be said that there is much thoughtful and powerful writing in most if not in all of them, with occasional phrases or couplets of rare felicity, and here and there a noble note of enthusiasm or a masterly touch of satire. In the epistle to Sir Edward Sackville the sketch of the ' infants of the sword ' who ' give thanks by stealth ' and in whispers for benefits which they are ready to disown with imprecations in public is worthy of the hand which drew Bobadil and Tucca. The sonnet to Lady Mary Wroth, good in itself, is characteristic in its preference of the orthodox Italian structure to the English or Shakespearean form. The four very powerful and remarkable elegies on a lovers' quarrel and separation I should be inclined to attribute rather to Donne than to Jonson ; their earnest passion, their quaint frankness, their verbal violence, their eccentric ardour of expression, at once unabashed and vehement, spontaneous and ingenious, are all of them typical characteristics of the future dean in the secular and irregular days of his hot poetic youth. The fourth and final poem of the little series is especially impressive and attractive. The turn of the sentences and the cadence of the verse are no less significant of the authorship than is a noble couplet in the poem immediately preceding them—which would at once be recognised by a competent reader as Jonson's :—

So may the fruitful vine my temples steep,  
And fame wake for me when I yield to sleep !

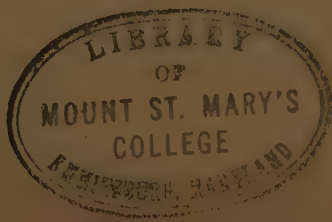
The ' epistle answering to one that asked to be sealed of the tribe of Ben ' is better in spirit than in



execution ; manful, straightforward, and upright. The 'epigram' or rather satire 'on the Court Pucelle' goes beyond even the license assumed by Pope in the virulent ferocity of its personal attack on a woman. This may be explained, or at least illustrated, by the fact that Ben Jonson's views regarding womanhood in general were radically cynical though externally chivalrous : a charge which can be brought against no other poet or dramatist of his age. He could pay more splendid compliments than any of them to this or that particular woman ; the deathless epitaph on 'Sydney's sister, Pembroke's mother,' is but the crowning flower of a garland, the central jewel of a set ; but no man has said coarser (I had wellnigh written, viler) things against the sex to which these exceptionally honoured patronesses belonged. This characteristic is not more significant than the corresponding evidence given by comparison of his readiness to congratulate and commend other poets and poeticals for work not always worthy of his notice, and at the same time to indulge in such sweeping denunciation of all contemporary poetry as would not have misbecome the utterance of incarnate envy—in other words, as might have fallen from the lips of Byron. See, for one most flagrant and glaring example of what might seem the very lunacy of malignity, a passage in what Coleridge has justly called 'his splendid dedication of *The Fox*.' Here he talks of raising 'the despised head of poetry again, *and stripping her out of those rotten and base rags wherewith the times have adulterated her form.*' It is difficult to resist a temptation to emulate Ben Jonson's own utmost vehemence of language when we remember that this sentence is dated the 11th of February, 1607. Nine years before the death of Shakespeare the greatest

writer of all time, the most wonderful human creature of all ages, was in the very zenith of his powers and his glory. And this was a contemporary poet's view of the condition of contemporary poetry. He was not more unlucky as a courtier and a prophet when he proclaimed the triumphant security of the English government as twice ensured by the birth of the future King James II.

The memorial ode on the death of Sir Henry Morison has thoughtful and powerful touches in it, as well as one stanza so far above the rest that it gains by a process which would impair its effect if the poem were on the whole even a tolerably good one. The famous lines on 'the plant and flower of light' can be far better enjoyed when cut away from the context. The opening is as eccentrically execrable as the epode of the solitary strophe which redeems from all but unqualified execration a poem in which Gifford finds 'the very soul of Pindar'—whose reputation would in that case be the most inexplicable of riddles. Far purer in style and far more equable in metre is the 'ode gratulatory' to Lord Weston; and the 'epithalamion' on the marriage of that nobleman's son, though not without inequalities, crudities, and platitudes, is on the whole a fine and dignified example of ceremonial poetry. Another of the laureate's best effusions of official verse is the short ode which bids his 'gentle Muse' rouse herself to celebrate the king's birthday, 'though now our green conceits be grey,' with good wishes which have a tragic ring in the modern reader's ear. A more unequal poem than the elegy on the Marchioness of Winchester is hardly to be found anywhere; but the finest passages are noble indeed. The elegiac poems on the famous *demi-mondaine* Venetia Stanley, who



made a comparatively respectable end as Lady Digby, are equally startling and amusing in their attribution to that heroine of a character which would justify the beatification if not the canonisation of its immaculate possessor. The first of these is chiefly remarkable for a singular Scotticism—‘ where Seraphim *take tent* of ordering all ’ ; the fragment of the second, as an early attempt—I know not whether it be the earliest—to introduce the *terza rima* into English verse. There are one or two fine stanzas in the fourth, and the *Apotheosis* of this singular saint has a few good couplets ; it contains, however, probably the most horrible and barbarous instance of inversion which the violated language can display :—

*in her hand*  
*With boughs of palm, a crownèd victrice stand.*

Such indefinable enormities as this cannot but incline us to think that this great scholar, this laurelled invader and conqueror of every field and every province of classic learning, was *intus et in cute* an irreclaimable and incurable barbarian. And assuredly this impression will be neither removed nor modified when we come to examine his translations from Latin poetry. If the report is to be believed which attributes to Ben Jonson the avowal of an opinion that above all things he excelled in translation, it must be admitted that for once the foolish theory which represents men of genius as incapable of recognising what is or is not their best work or their most distinguishing faculty is justified and exemplified after a fashion so memorable that the exception must be invoked to prove the rule. For a worse translator than Ben Jonson never committed a double outrage on two languages at once. I should be reluctant to quote

examples of this lamentable truth, if it were not necessary to vindicate his contemporaries from such an imputation as is conveyed in the general belief that his method of translation is merely the method of his age. The fact is that it is as exceptionally abominable as his genius, when working on its own proper and original lines, is exceptionally admirable. I am no great lover of Horace, but I cannot pretend to think that the words

Si torrere jecur quæris idoneum

are adequately rendered by the words

If a fit liver thou dost seek to toast.

Fate and fire did a double injury, if not a double injustice, to Ben Jonson, when his commentary on Horace's *Art of Poetry* was consumed and his translation of the text preserved. The commentary in which Donne was represented under the name of Criticus must have been one of the most interesting and valuable of Jonson's prose works : the translation is one of those miracles of incompetence, incongruity, and insensibility which must be seen to be believed. It may be admitted that there is a very happy instance of exact and pointed rendering from the ninth and tenth lines of the original in the eleventh and twelfth lines of the translation.

Pictoribus atque poetis

Quidlibet audendi semper fuit æqua potestas.

Scimus.

Pope himself could not have rendered this well-known passage more neatly, more smoothly, more perfectly and more happily than thus :—

But equal power to painter and to poet

Of daring all hath still been given : we know it.

And in the seventh line following we come upon this indescribable horror—an abomination of which Abraham Fraunce or Gabriel Harvey would by charitable readers have been considered incapable : as perhaps indeed they were :—

A scarlet piece or two stitch'd in ; when or  
Diana's grove or altar, *with the bor-*  
*D'ring* circles of swift waters, etc., etc.

' The bellman writes better verses,' said Mr. Osbaldistone, when he threw poor Frank's away. Walt Whitman writes no worse, a modern critic will reflect on reading these.

The version of one of Martial's gracefulest epigrams flows more pleasantly than usual till it ends with a horrible jolt, thus :—

He that but living half his days dies such,  
Makes his life longer than 'twas given him, much.

And Echo answers—Much ! Gifford, however, waxes ecstatic over these eight lines. ' It is the most beautiful of all the versions of this elegant poem,' and, if we may believe him, ' clearly and fully expresses the whole of its meaning.' Witness the second line :—

Thou worthy in eternal flower to fare.

That is no more English than it is Latin—no more accurate than it is intelligible. The original is as simple as it is lovely :—

Liber in æternâ vivere digne rosâ.

It would be worse than superfluous to look among his other versions from Horace for further evidence of Ben Jonson's incomparable incompetence as a translator. But as this has been hitherto very insufficiently insisted on—his reputation as a poet and



a scholar standing apparently between the evidence of this fact and the recognition of it—I will give one crowning example from *The Poetaster*. This is what Virgil is represented as reading to Augustus—and Augustus as hearing without a shriek of agony and horror :—

Meanwhile the skies 'gan thunder, and in tail <sup>1</sup>  
Of that fell pouring storms of sleet and hail.

'In tail of that'! *Proh Deūm atque hominum fidem!*  
And it is Virgil—Virgil, of all men and all poets—to whom his traducer has the assurance to attribute this inexpressible atrocity of outrage!

The case of Ben Jonson is the great standing example of a truth which should never be forgotten or overlooked; that no amount of learning, of labour, or of culture will supply the place of natural taste and native judgment—will avail in any slightest degree to confer the critical faculty upon a man to whom nature has denied it. Just judgment of others, just judgment of himself, was all but impossible to this great writer, this consummate and indefatigable scholar, this generous and enthusiastic friend. The noble infirmity of excess in benevolence is indisputably no less obvious in three great writers of our own century; great, each of them, like Ben Jonson, in prose as well as in verse: one of them greater than he, one of them equal, and one of them hardly to be accounted equal with him. Victor Hugo, Walter Savage Landor, and Théophile Gautier were doubtless as exuberant in generosity—the English poet was perhaps as indiscriminate in enthusiasm of patronage or of sympathy—as even the promiscuous panegyrist of Shakespeare, of Fletcher, of Chapman, of Drayton, of Browne, of

<sup>1</sup> Compare *Æn.* iv. 160.

Brome, and of May; and moreover of one Stephens, of one Rutter, of one Wright, of one Warre, and of one Filmer. Of these last five names, that of the worthy Master Joseph Rutter—Ben's 'dear son, and right learned friend'—is the only one which signifies to me the existence of an author not utterly unknown. His spiritual father or theatrical sponsor is most copious and most cordial in his commendation of the good man's pastoral drama; he has not mentioned its one crowning excellence—the quality for which, having tried it every night for upwards of six weeks running, I can confidently and conscientiously recommend it. Chloral is not only more dangerous but very much less certain as a soporific: the sleeplessness which could resist the influence of Mr. Rutter's verse can be curable only by dissolution; the eyes which can keep open through the perusal of six consecutive pages must never hope to find rest but in the grave.

The many ceremonial or occasional poems addressed to friends and patrons of various ranks and characters, from the king and queen to a Mr. Burges and a Mr. Squib, are of equally various interest, now graver and now lighter, to a careful student of Ben Jonson as a poet and a man. Nor, when due account is taken of the time and its conventional habits of speech, does it seem to me that any of them can be justly charged with servility or flattery, or, as the writer might have said, with 'assentation.' But these effusions or improvisations are of no more serious importance than the exquisitely neat and terse composition of the 'Leges Convivales,' or the admirable good sense and industry, the admirable perspicacity and perspicuity, which will be recognised no less in the Latin than in the English part of his English

Grammar. It is interesting to observe an anticipation of Landor's principle with respect to questions of orthography, in the preference given to the Latin form of spelling for words of Latin derivation, while admitting that this increase of accuracy would bring the written word no nearer to the sound uttered in speaking. The passage is worth transcription as an example of delicately scrupulous accuracy and subtly conscientious refinement in explanation:—

Alii hæc haud inconsultò scribunt *abil, stabil, fabul*; tanquam a fontibus *habilis, stabilis, fabula*: veriùs, sed nequicquam proficiunt. Nam consideratiùs auscultanti nec *i* nec *u* est, sed tinnitus quidam, *vocalis* naturam habens, quæ naturaliter his liquidis inest.

A point on which I am sorry to rest uncertain whether Landor would have felt as much sympathy with Jonson's view as I feel myself is the regret expressed by the elder poet for the loss of the Saxon characters that distinguished the two different sounds now both alike expressed, and expressed with equal inaccuracy, by the two letters *th*. 'And in this,' says Jonson—as it seems to me, most reasonably—'consists the greatest difficulty of our alphabet and true writing.'

The text of the grammar, both Latin and English, requires careful revision and correction; but indeed as much must be said of the text of Jonson's works in general. Gifford did very much for it, but he left not a little to be done. And the arrangement adopted in Colonel Cunningham's beautiful and serviceable edition of 1875 is the most extraordinary—at least, I hope and believe so—on record. All the misreadings of the edition of 1816 are retained in the text, where they stand not merely uncorrected but

unremarked ; so that the bewildered student must refer at random, on the even chance of disappointment, to an appendix in which he may find them irregularly registered, with some occasional comment on the previous editor's negligence and caprice : a method, to put it as mildly as possible, somewhat provocative of strong language on the part of a studious and belated reader—language for which it cannot rationally be imagined that it is he who will be registered by the recording angel as culpably responsible. What is wanted in the case of so great an English classic is of course nothing less than this : a careful and complete edition of all his extant writings, with all the various readings of the various editions published during his lifetime. This is the very least that should be exacted ; and this is less than has yet been supplied. Edition after edition of Shakespeare is put forth under the auspices of scholars or of dunces without a full and plain enumeration of the exact differences of text—the corrections, suppressions, alterations, and modifications—which distinguish the text of the quartos from the too frequently garbled and mangled, the sometimes transfigured and glorified text of the folio. And consequently not one devoted student in a thousand has a chance of knowing what he has a right to know of the gradations and variations in expression, the development and the self-discipline in display, of the most transcendent intelligence that ever illuminated humanity. And in the case of Shakespeare's most loyal comrade and panegyrist—though sometimes, it may be, his rather captious rival and critic—the neglect of his professed devotees and editorial interpreters has been scarcely less scandalous and altogether as incomprehensible. In every edition which makes any pretence to completeness, or

to satisfaction of a serious student's indispensable requisites and inevitable demands, the first text of *Every Man in his Humour* should of course be given in full. Snatches and scraps of it are given in the notes to the edition of 1816; the first act is reprinted—the first act alone—in the appendix to the first volume of the edition of 1875. What would be said by Hellenists or Latinists if such contemptuous indolence, such insolence of neglect, were displayed by the editor of a Greek or Latin poet—assuming that his edition had been meant for other than fourth-form or fifth-form service? Compare the devotion of their very best editors to Shakespeare and to Jonson with the devotion of Mr. Ellis to Catullus and Mr. Munro to Lucretius. It is a shame that Englishmen should not be forthcoming who would think it worth while to expend as much labour, and would be competent to bring that labour to as good an end, in the service of their own immortal countrymen, as is expended and as is attained by classical scholars in the service of alien and not more adorable gods. And on one point—a point indeed of more significance than importance—the capricious impertinence of such editors as do condescend to undertake any part of such a task is so inexplicable except on one supposition that we are tempted to embrace, or at least to accept, the assumption that the editor (for instance) of Ben Jonson considers the author of *The Silent Woman*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and certain metrical emetics classified under the head of *Epigrams*, as a writer fit to be placed in the hands of schoolgirls. And even then it is difficult to imagine why we come upon certain rows of asterisks in the record of his conversations with Drummond, and in the anonymous interlude written—as Gifford supposes—‘for the christening



of a son of the Earl of Newcastle, to whom the king or the prince stood godfather.' Even if Jonson had taken—as on such an occasion it would be strange if he had taken—the utmost license of his friends Aristophanes and Rabelais, this would be no reason for treating the reader like a schoolboy or a Dauphin. What a man of genius has written for a public occasion is public property thenceforward and for ever : and the pretence of a man like Gifford to draw the line and determine the limit of publicity is inexpressibly preposterous.

The little interlude, however broad and even coarse in its realistic pleasantries, is a quaint and spirited piece of work ; but there are other matters in Colonel Cunningham's appendix which have no right, demonstrable or imaginable, to the place they occupy. It is incredible, it is inconceivable, that Jonson should ever have written such a line as this by way of a Latin verse :—

Macte : tuo scriptores lectoresque labore (! ! !).

'Les chassepots partiraient d'eux-mêmes'—birch would make itself into spontaneous rods for the schoolboy who could perpetrate so horrible an atrocity. The repulsive and ridiculous rubbish which has ignorantly and absurdly been taken for 'a fragment of one of the lost quaternions of *Eupheme*' is part, I am sorry to say, of an elegy by Francis Beaumont on one Lady Markham. It is an intolerable scandal that the public should be content to endure such an outrage as the intrusion of another man's abominable absurdities into the text of such a writer as Ben Jonson. This effusion of his young friend's, which must surely have been meant as a joke—and a very bad, not to say a very brutal one—is probably the most

hideous nonsense ever written on the desecrated subject of death and decay. A smaller but a serious example of negligence and incompetence is patent in the text of the ten lines contributed by Jonson to the *Annalia Dubrensis*—that most pleasant and curious athletic anthology, the reissue of which is one of the wellnigh countless obligations conferred on students of the period by the devoted industry, energy, and ability of Dr. Grosart. He, of course, could not fail to see that the first of these lines was corrupt. 'I cannot bring my *Muse* to dropp Vies' is obviously neither sense nor metre. It is rather with diffidence than with confidence that I would suggest the reading *double* in place of the palpably corrupt word *drop*: but from Gifford's explanation of the gambling term *vie* I should infer that this reading, which certainly rectifies the metre, might also restore the sense. Another obvious error is to be noted in the doggrel lines on Lady Ogle, which afford a curious and compact example of Ben Jonson's very worst vices of style and metre. Still, as Ben was not in the habit of writing flat nonsense, we ought evidently to read 'in the *sight* of Angels,' not, as absurdly printed in the edition of 1875 (ix. 326), 'in the Light'; especially as the next verse ends with that word. The commendatory verses on *Cynthia's Revenge* which reappear at page 346 of the same volume had appeared on page 332 of the volume immediately preceding. Such editorial derelictions and delinquencies are enough to inoculate the most patient reader's humour with the acerbity of Gifford's or Carlyle's. Again, this appendix gives only one or two fragments of the famous additional scenes to *The Spanish Tragedy*, while the finest and most important passages are omitted and ignored. For one

thing, however, we have reason to be grateful to the compiler who has inserted for the first time among Ben Jonson's works the fine and flowing stanzas described by their author as an allegoric ode. This poem, which in form is Horatian, has no single stanza so beautiful or so noble as the famous third strophe of the Pindaric ode to Sir Lucius Cary on the death of Sir Henry Morison; but its general superiority in purity of style and fluidity of metre is as remarkable as the choice and use of proper names with such a dexterous felicity as to emulate while it recalls the majestic and magnificent instincts of Marlowe and of Milton.

If the fame of Ben Jonson were in any degree dependent on his minor or miscellaneous works in verse, it would be difficult to assign him a place above the third or fourth rank of writers belonging to the age of Shakespeare. His station in the first class of such writers, and therefore in the front rank of English authors, is secured mainly by the excellence of his four masterpieces in comedy; *The Fox* and *The Alchemist*, *The Staple of News* and *Every Man in his Humour*: but a single leaf of his *Discoveries* is worth all his lyrics, tragedies, elegies, and epigrams together. That golden little book of noble thoughts and subtle observations is the one only province of his vast and varied empire which yet remains for us to examine; and in none other will there be found more ample and more memorable evidence how truly great a man demands our homage—'on this side idolatry'—for the imperishable memory of Ben Jonson.

### III

#### DISCOVERIES

THAT chance is the ruler of the world I should be sorry to believe and reluctant to affirm ; but it would be difficult for any competent and careful student to maintain that chance is not the ruler of the world of letters. Gray's odes are still, I suppose, familiar to thousands who know nothing of Donne's *Anniversaries* ; and Bacon's Essays are conventionally if not actually familiar to thousands who know nothing of Ben Jonson's *Discoveries*. And yet it is certain that in fervour of inspiration, in depth and force and glow of thought and emotion and expression, Donne's verses are as far above Gray's as Jonson's notes or observations on men and morals, on principles and on facts, are superior to Bacon's in truth of insight, in breadth of view, in vigour of reflection and in concision of eloquence. The dry, curt style of the statesman, docked and trimmed into sentences that are regularly snapped off or snipped down at the close of each deliverance, is as alien and as far from the fresh and vigorous spontaneity of the poet's as is the trimming and hedging morality of the essay on 'simulation and dissimulation' from the spirit and instinct of the man who 'of all things loved to be called honest.' But indeed, from the ethical point of view which looks merely or mainly to character, the comparison is little less than an insult to the laureate ; and from the purely intelligent or æsthetic point of view I should

be disposed to say, or at least inclined to think, that the comparison would be hardly less unduly complimentary to the Chancellor.

For at the very opening of these *Explorata, or Discoveries*, we find ourselves in so high and so pure an atmosphere of feeling and of thought that we cannot but recognise and rejoice in the presence and the influence of one of the noblest, manliest, most honest and most helpful natures that ever dignified and glorified a powerful intelligence and an admirable genius. In the very first note, the condensed or concentrated quintessence of a Baconian essay on Fortune, we find these among other lofty and weighty words: 'Heaven prepares good men with crosses; but no ill can happen to a good man.' 'That which happens to any man, may to every man. But it is in his reason what he accounts it and will make it.'

There is perhaps in the structure of this sentence something too much of the Latinist—too strong a flavour of the style of Tacitus in its elaborate if not laborious terseness of expression. But the following could hardly be bettered:—

No man is so foolish but may give another good counsel sometimes; and no man is so wise but may easily err, if he will take no other's counsel but his own. But very few men are wise by their own counsel, or learned by their own teaching. For he that was only taught by himself had a fool to his master.

The mind's ear may find or fancy a silvery ring of serene good sense in the note of that reflection; but the ring of what follows is pure gold:—

There is a necessity all men should love their country; he that professeth the contrary may be delighted with his words, but his heart is [not] there.



The magnificent expansion or paraphrase of this noble thought in the fourth scene of Landor's magnificent tragedy of *Count Julian* should be familiar to all capable students of English poetry at its purest and proudest height of sublime contemplation. That probably or rather undoubtedly unconscious echo of the sentiment of an older poet and patriot has in it the prolonged reverberation and repercussion of music which we hear in the echoes of thunder or a breaking sea.

Again, how happy in the bitterness of its truth is the next remark: 'Natures that are hardened to evil you shall sooner break than make straight: they are like poles that are crooked and dry: there is no attempting them.' And how grand is this:—

I cannot think nature is so spent and decayed that she can bring forth nothing worth her former years. She is always the same, like herself; and when she collects her strength,<sup>1</sup> is abler still. *Men are decayed, and studies: she is not.*

Jonson never wrote a finer verse than that; and very probably he never observed that it was a verse.

The next note is one of special interest to all students of the great writer who has so often been described as a blind worshipper and a servile disciple of classical antiquity:—

'I know nothing can conduce more to letters,' says the too obsequious observer of Tacitus and of Cicero in the composition of his Roman tragedies, 'than to examine the writings of the ancients, and not to rest on their sole authority, or take all upon trust from them; provided the plagues of judging and pronouncing against them be away; such as are envy, bitterness, precipitation, impudence, and scurril scoffing. For, to

---

<sup>1</sup> As in the production of Shakespeare—if his good friend Ben had but known it.

all the observations of the ancients, we have our own experience; which if we will use and apply, we have better means to pronounce. It is true they opened the gates, and made the way, that went before us; but as guides, not commanders: *Non domini nostri sed duces fuere*. Truth lies open to all; it is no man's several. *Patet omnibus veritas: nondum est occupata. Multum ex illâ etiam futuris relictum est.*<sup>1</sup>

Time and space would fail me to transcribe all that is worth transcription, to comment on everything that deserves commentary, in this treasure-house of art and wisdom, eloquence and good sense. But the following extract could be passed over by no eye but a mole's or a bat's:—

I do not desire to be equal with those that went before; but to have my reason examined with theirs, and so much faith to be given them, or me, as those shall evict [in modern English—if the text is not corrupt—‘as the comparison or confrontation of theirs with mine shall elicit’]. I am neither author nor fautor of any sect. I will have no man addict himself to me; but if I have anything right, defend it as Truth's, not mine, save as it conduceth to a common good. It profits not me to have any man fence or fight for me, to flourish, or take my side. Stand for Truth, and 'tis enough.

The haughty vindication of ‘arts that respect the mind’ as ‘nobler than those that serve the body, though we less can be without them’ (the latter), is at once amusingly and admirably Jonsonian. Admitting the ignoble fact that without ‘such ‘arts’ as ‘tillage, spinning, weaving, building, etc.,’ ‘we could scarce sustain life a day,’ a proposition which it certainly would seem difficult to dispute, he proceeds in the loftiest tone of professional philosophy: ‘But these were the works of every hand; the other of the

<sup>1</sup> The scandalously neglected text reads *relicta*. Perhaps we should read ‘*Multa- relicta sunt.*’

brain only, and those the most generous and exalted wits and spirits, that cannot rest or acquiesce. 'The mind of man is still fed with labour : *opere pascitur*.'

This conscientious and self-conscious pride of intellect finds even a nobler and more memorable expression in the admirable words which instruct or which remind us of the truth that 'it is as great a spite to be praised in the wrong place, and by the wrong person, as can be done to a noble nature.' A sentence worthy to be set beside the fittest motto for all loyal men—'Æqua laus est a laudatis laudari et ab improbis improbari.' Which it would be well 'that every man worthy to apply it should lay to heart, and act and bear himself accordingly.

It is to be wished that the dramatist and humorist had always or had usually borne in mind the following excellent definition or reflection of the aphoristic philosopher or student : 'A tedious person is one a man would leap a steeple from, gallop down any steep hill to avoid him ; forsake his meat, sleep, nature itself, with all her benefits, to shun him.' What then shall we say of the courtiers in *Cynthia's Revels* and the vapourers in *Bartholomew Fair* ?

The following is somewhat especially suggestive of a present political application ; and would find its appropriate setting in a modern version of the *Irish Masque* :—

He is a narrow-minded man that affects a triumph in any glorious study ; but to triumph in a lie, and a lie themselves have forged, is frontless. Folly often goes beyond her bounds ; but Impudence knows none.

From the forty-third to the forty-eighth entry inclusive these disconnected notes should be read as a short continuous essay on envy and calumny.

•

For weight, point, and vigour, it would hardly be possible to overpraise it.

In the admirable note on such 'foolish lovers' as 'wish the same to their friends as their enemies would,' merely that they might have occasion to display the constancy of their regard, there is a palpable and preposterous misprint, which reduces to nonsense a remarkably fine passage: 'They make a causeway to their courtesy by injury; as if it were not honester to do nothing than to seek a way to do good by a mischief.' For the obviously right word 'courtesy' the unspeakable editors read 'country'; which let him explain who can.

The two notes on injuries and benefits are observable for their wholesome admixture of common sense with magnanimity:—

Injuries do not extinguish courtesies: they only suffer them not to appear fair. For a man that doth me an injury after a courtesy takes not away that courtesy, but defaces it: as he that writes other verses upon my verses takes not away the first letters, but hides them.

Surely no sentence more high-minded and generous than that was ever written: nor one more sensible and dignified than this:—

The doing of courtesies aright is the mixing of the respects for his own sake and for mine. He that doeth them merely for his own sake is like one that feeds his cattle to sell them: he hath his horse well drest for Smithfield.

The following touch of mental autobiography is not less interesting than curious. Had Shakespeare but left us the like!

I myself could in my youth have repeated all that ever I had made, and so continued till I was past forty: since, it is much

decayed in me. Yet I can repeat whole books that I have read, and poems of some selected friends, which I have liked to charge my memory with. It was wont to be faithful to me ; but, shaken with age now, and sloth, which weakens the strongest abilities, it may perform somewhat, but cannot promise much. By exercise it is to be made better, and serviceable. Whatsoever I pawned with it while I was young, and a boy, it offers me readily, and without stops : but what I trust to it now, or have done of later years, it lays up more negligently, and oftentimes loses ; so that I receive mine own (though frequently called for) as if it were new and borrowed. Nor do I always find presently from it what I seek : but while I am doing another thing, that I laboured for will come ; and what I sought with trouble will offer itself when I am quiet. Now in some men [was Shakespeare, we must ask ourselves, one of these ?] I have found it as happy as nature, who, whatsoever they read or pen, they can say without book presently ; as if they did then write in their mind. And it is more a wonder in such as have a swift style, for their memories are commonly slowest ; such as torture their writings, and go into council for every word, must needs fix somewhat, and make it their own at last, though but through their own vexation.

I cannot but imagine that Jonson must have witnessed this wonder in the crowning case of Shakespeare ; the swiftness of whose ' style ' or composition was matter of general note.

The anti-Gallican or anti-democratic view of politics can never be more vividly or happily presented than in these brilliant and incisive words :—

Suffrages in Parliament are numbered, not weighed : nor can it be otherwise in those public councils, *where nothing is so unequal as the equality* : for there, how odd soever men's brains or wisdoms are, their power is always even and the same.

But the most cordial hater or scorner of parliaments, whether from the Carlylesque or the Bonapartist point



of vantage, must allow that the truth expressed in the two first sentences following is more certain and more precious than the doctrine just cited :—

Truth is man's proper good, and the only immortal thing was given to our mortality to use. No good Christian or ethnic, if he be honest, can miss it : no statesman or patriot should. For without truth all the actions of mankind are craft, malice, or what you will, rather than wisdom. Homer says he hates him worse than hell-mouth that utters one thing with his tongue and keeps another in his breast. Which high expression was grounded on divine reason : for a lying mouth is a stinking pit, and murders with the contagion it venteth. Besides, nothing is lasting that is feigned ; it will have another face than it had ere long. As Euripides saith, ' No lie ever grows old.'

It would be well if this were so : but the inveterate reputation of Euripides as a dramatic poet is hardly reconcilable with the truth of his glibly optimistic assumption. Nor, had that fluent and facile dealer in flaccid verse and sentimental sophistry spoken truth for once in this instance, should we have had occasion to wonder at the admiration expressed for him by the most subtle and sincere, the most profound and piercing intelligence of our time ; nor could that sense of reverential amazement have found spontaneous expression in the following couplet of Hudibrastic doggrel :—

That the huckster of pathos, whose gift was insipid ease,  
Finds favour with Browning, must puzzle Euripides.

But Jonson himself, it seems to me, was far less trustworthy as a critic of poetry than as a judge on ethics or a student of character. The tone of supercilious goodwill and friendly condonation which distinguishes his famous note on Shakespeare is

unmistakable except by the most wilful perversity of prepossession. His noble metrical tribute to Shakespeare's memory must of course be taken into account when we are disposed to think too hardly of this honest if egotistic eccentricity of error : but it would be foolish to suppose that the most eloquent cordiality of a ceremonial poem could express more of one man's real and critical estimate of another than a deliberate reflection of later date. And it needs the utmost possible exertion of charity, the most generous exercise of justice, to forgive the final phrase of preposterous patronage and considerate condescension—'There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned.' The candid author of *Sejanus* could on the whole afford to admit so much with respect to the popular author of *Hamlet*.

In the subsequent essay, divided under ten several heads into ten several notes, on 'the difference of wits,' or the diversity of accomplishments and understandings, there is much worth study for its soundness of judgment, its accuracy of definition, and its felicity of expression. It would be well if educational and professional formalists would bear in mind the truth that 'there is no doctrine will do good, where nature is wanting'; and nothing could be neater, terser, or truer than the definition of those characters 'that are forward and bold; and these will do every little thing easily; I mean, that is hard by and next them, which they will utter unretarded without any shamefastness. These never perform much, but quickly. They are what they are, on the sudden; they show presently, like grain that, scattered on the top of the ground, shoots up, but takes no root; has a yellow blade, but the ear empty. They are wits of good promise at first, but there is an ingenistitium—a

wit-stand : they stand still at sixteen, they get no higher.'

As well worth remark and recollection are the succeeding notes on 'others, that labour only to ostentation ; and are ever more busy about the colours and surface of a work than in the matter and foundation : for that is hid, the other is seen ' ; and on those whose style of composition is purposely ' rough and broken—and if it would come gently, they trouble it of purpose. They would not have it run without rubs : as if that style were more strong and manly that struck the ear with a kind of unevenness. These men err not by chance, but knowingly and willingly ; they are like men that affect a fashion by themselves, have some singularity in a ruff, cloak, or hat-band ; or their beards specially cut to provoke beholders, and set a mark upon themselves. They would be reprehended, while they are looked on. And this vice, one, that is in authority with the rest, loving, delivers over to them to be imitated ; so that oft-times the faults which he fell into, the others seek for : this is the danger, when vice becomes a precedent.'

It is difficult to imagine that Jonson was not here thinking of the great writer whom ' he esteemed the first poet in the world in some things,' but upon whom he passed the too sweeping though too plausible sentence ' that Donne, for not being understood, would perish.' Nor can we suppose that he was not alluding to Daniel—the inoffensive object of his implacable satire—when he laid a ' chastising hand ' on ' others that have no composition at all, but a kind of tuning and rhyming fall, in what they write. It runs and slides, and only makes a sound. Women's poets they are called, as you have women's tailors.—You may sound these wits and find the depth of

...m with your middle finger. They are cream-bowl-  
but puddle-) deep.'

An amusing anticipation of the peculiar genius for  
borate mendacity which distinguishes and connects  
the names of De Quincey and Mérimée will be  
found in Jonson's words of stern and indignant  
assurance on 'some who, after they have got authority,  
which is less, opinion, by their writings, to have  
dared much, dare presently to feign whole books and  
authors, and lie safely. For what never was will  
not easily be found; not by the most curious.'  
Certainly it was not by the innocent readers whose  
search into the original authorities for the history  
of the revolt of the Tartars, or whose interest in the  
original text of Clara Gazul's plays and the Illyrian  
tragedies of *La Guzla*, must have given such keen  
sight to those two frontless and matchless charlatans  
of genius.

The keen and scornful intelligence of Jonson finds  
a less admirable expression in the two succeeding  
satires; of which the first sets a brand on such cunning  
pedagogues as protest against all reading, and so 'think  
to divert the sagacity of their readers from themselves,  
and cool the scent of their own fox-like thefts';  
and, as he proceeds to observe, 'the obstinate con-  
sumers of all helps and arts' are in a 'wretcheder'  
state than even these. His description of such pre-  
ceptors is too lifelike, and too vivid in its perennial  
accuracy, to be overlooked; 'such as presuming on  
their own natural (which perhaps are excellent) dare  
hide all diligence, and seem to mock at the terms  
when they understand not the things; thinking that  
they may get off wittily with their ignorance. These  
are imitated often by such as are their peers in negli-  
gence, though they cannot be in nature; and they

utter all they can think with a kind of violence and indisposition ; unexamined, without relation to person, place, or any fitness else ; and the more wilful and stubborn they are in it, the more learned they are esteemed of the multitude, through their excellent vice of judgment ; who think those things the stronger, that have no art ; as if to break were better than to open ; or to rend asunder, gentler than to loose.'

In the tenth section or subdivision of this irregular and desultory but incisive and masterly essay we find a singular combination of critical insight with personal prejudice—of general truth with particular error. But the better part is excellent alike in reflection and in expression.

It cannot but come to pass that these men who commonly seek to do more than enough may sometimes happen on something that is good and great ; but very seldom : and when it comes it doth not recompense the rest of their ill.—The true artificer will not run away from nature, as he were afraid of her ; or depart from life, and the likeness of truth ; but speak to the capacity of his hearers.

The rest of the note is valuable as a studious and elaborate expression of Jonson's theory or ideal of dramatic poetry, couched in apt and eloquent phrases of thoughtful and balanced rhetoric ; regrettable only for the insulting reference to the first work of a yet greater poet than himself, to whose ' mighty line ' he had paid immortal homage in an earlier and a better mood of judgment.

But however prone he may be to error or perversity in particular instances or in personal examples, he is constantly and nobly right in his axiomatic reflections and his general observations. The follow-



ing passage seems to me a magnificent illustration of this truth :—

I know no disease of the soul but ignorance ; not of the arts and sciences, but of itself : yet relating to those it is a pernicious evil, the darkener of man's life, the disturber of his reason, and the common confounder of truth ; with which a man goes groping in the dark, no otherwise than if he were blind. Great understandings are most racked and troubled with it ; nay, sometimes they will rather choose to die than not to know the things they study for.<sup>1</sup> Think then what an evil it is, and what [a] good the contrary.

The ensuing note on knowledge has less depth of direct insight, less force of practical reason ; but the definition which follows is singularly eloquent and refined, however scholastic and irrational in its casuistic and rhetorical subtlety :—

Knowledge is the action of the soul, and is perfect without the senses,<sup>2</sup> as having the seeds of all science and virtue in itself ; but not without the service of the senses ; by these organs the soul works : she is a perpetual agent, prompt and subtle ; but often flexible and erring, entangling herself like a silkworm : but her reason is a weapon with two edges, and cuts through.

I am inclined to suspect that we may discern in the next note another fragment of autobiography. For it may be doubted whether 'the boon Delphic god,' so admirably described by his faithful acolyte Marmion as presiding in the form of a human laureate over the Bacchanalian oracle of Apollo, can ever have

<sup>1</sup> No modern reader of these lofty words can fail to call to mind the sublime pathos and the historic interest of Mr. Browning's glorious poem, *A Grammarian's Funeral*.

<sup>2</sup> It is a pity we are not told how ; for to the ordinary intelligence of reasoning mankind it would appear that 'without the senses' not only could knowledge not be perfect, but it could not even exist in the most inchoate or embryonic phase of being.

been able to say with equal truth of another than himself,

I have known a man vehement on both sides, that knew no mean either to intermit his studies or call upon them again. When he hath set himself to writing, he would join night to day, press upon himself without release, not minding it, till he fainted ; and when he got off, resolve himself into all sports and looseness again, that it was almost a despair to draw him to his book ; but once got to it, he grew stronger and more earnest by the ease. His whole powers were renewed : he would work out of himself what he desired ; but with such excess, as his study could not be ruled : he knew not how to dispose his own abilities or husband them, he was of that immoderate power against himself. Nor was he only a strong but an absolute speaker and writer ; but his subtlety did not show itself ; his judgment thought that a vice : for the ambush hurts more that is hid. He never forced his language, nor went out of the highway of speaking, but for some great necessity, or apparent profit : for he denied figures to be invented for ornament, but for aid : and still thought it an extreme madness to bend or wrest that which ought to be right.

If any reader should think such a mixture of critical self-examination and complacent self-glorification impossible to any man of indisputable genius and of general good sense, that reader is not yet ' sealed of the tribe of Ben ' ; he has not arrived at a due appreciation of the writer's general strength and particular weakness as a critic and a workman, an artist and a thinker.

The note on famous orators is remarkable for its keen discrimination and appreciation of various talents ; and the subsequent analysis or definition of Bacon's great gifts as a speaker, which has been often enough quoted to dispense with any fresh citation, is only less fine than the magnificent tribute paid a little

further on to the same great man in his days of adversity. It may well be questioned whether there exists a finer example of English prose than the latter famous passage; where sublimity is resolved into pathos, and pathos dilates into sublimity. His idealism of monarchy, however irrational it may seem to us, has a finer side to it than belongs to the blind superstition of such a royalist as Fletcher. Witness this striking and touching interpretation of an old metaphor: 'Why are prayers said with Orpheus to be the daughters of Jupiter, but that princes are thereby admonished that the petitions of the wretched ought to have more weight with them than the laws themselves?' And the following note gives a better and a kindlier impression of King James I. than anything else—as far as I know—recorded of that singular sovereign:—

It was a great accumulation to his majesty's deserved praise, that men might openly visit and pity those whom his greatest prisons had at any time received, or his laws condemned.

The note on 'the attribute of a prince' is rather Baconian than Jonsonian in its cult of 'prudence' as 'his chief art and safety'; but the peculiar and practical humour of Jonson's observant and studious satire is well exemplified in his strictures on such theological controversialists as 'are like swaggerers in a tavern, that catch that which stands next them, the candlesticks or pots—turn everything into a weapon: oftentimes they fight blindfold, and both beat the air. The one milks a he-goat, the other holds under a sieve. Their arguments are as fluxive as liquor spilt upon a table, which with your finger you may drain as you will.' But the remarks on 'untimely boasting' are especially worth transcription,

both for their own real excellence and for the unconscious but inexpressible drollery of such an utterance from the 'capacious mouth' which had so often and so loudly set forth under divers names and figures the claims and the merits of Ben Jonson:—

Men that talk of their own benefits are not believed to talk of them because they have done them, but to have done them because they might talk of them. That which had been great if another had reported it of them vanisheth and is nothing if he that did it speak of it. For men, when they cannot destroy the deed, will yet be glad to take advantage of the boasting and lessen it.

We may hope that these wise and weighty words were not written without some regretful if not repentant reminiscence of sundry occasions on which this rule of conduct had been grossly and grievously transgressed by the writer, to his own inevitable damage and discomfiture.

The note on flattery and flatterers is as exalted in its austerity as trenchant in its scorn. And the following remark 'on human life' is the condensed or distilled essence of a noble satire or a powerful essay:—

I have considered our whole life is like a play, wherein every man, forgetful of himself, is in travail with expression of another. Nay, we so insist in imitating others, as we cannot (when it is necessary) return to ourselves; like children that imitate the vices of stammerers so long, till at last they become such; and make the habit to another nature, as it is never forgotten.

There is a noble enthusiasm for goodness in the phrase which avers that 'good men are the stars, the planets of the ages wherein they live, and illustrate the times.' After an enumeration of scriptural

instances, the poet adds this commentary: 'These, sensual men thought mad, because they would not be partakers or practisers of their madness. But they, placed high on the top of all virtue, looked down on the stage of the world, and contemned the play of fortune. For though the most be players, some must be spectators.'

And there is a fine touch of grave and bitter humour in the discovery 'that a feigned familiarity in great ones is a note of certain usurpation on the less. For great and popular men feign themselves to be servants to others, to make those slaves to them. So the fisher provides bait for the trout, roach, dace, etc., that they may be food to him.'

But finer by far and far more memorable than this is the following commentary on the fact that the emperor whose 'voice was worthier a headsman than a head, when he wished the people of Rome had but one neck,' 'found (when he fell) they had many hands':—

A tyrant, how great and mighty soever he may seem to cowards and sluggards, is but one creature, one animal.

That sentence is worthy of Landor; and those who would reproach Ben Jonson with the extravagance of his monarchical doctrines or theories must admit that such royalism as is compatible with undisguised approval of regicide or tyrannicide might not irrationally be condoned by the sternest and most rigid of republicans.

The next eight notes or entries deal in a somewhat desultory fashion with the subject of government; and display, as might be expected, a very singular combination or confusion of obsolete sophistry and superstition with rational and liberal intelligence. He



attacks Machiavelli repeatedly, but there is a distinct streak of what is usually understood as Machiavellism in the remark, for example, that when a prince governs his people 'so as they have still need of his administration (for that is his art) he shall ever make and hold them faithful.' In answer to Machiavelli's principle of cruelty by proxy, he pleads with great and simple force of eloquence against all principles of cruelty whatever. Many noble passages might be quoted from this pleading; but only a few can here be selected from the third and fourth, the sixth and seventh, of the entries above mentioned; which may on the whole be considered, when all due reservation is made with regard to the monarchical principle or superstition, as composing altogether a concise and masterly essay on the art and the principles of wise and righteous government:—

Many punishments sometimes and in some cases as much discredit a prince as many funerals a physician. The state of things is secured by clemency: severity represseth a few, but irritates more. The lopping of trees makes the boughs shoot out thicker; and the taking away of some kind of enemies increaseth the number. It is then most gracious in a prince to pardon, when many about him would make him cruel; to think then how much he can save, when others tell him how much he can destroy; not to consider what the impotence of others hath demolished, but what his own greatness can sustain. These are a prince's virtues: and they that give him other counsels are but the hangman's factors.

But princes, by hearkening to cruel counsels, become in time obnoxious to the authors, their flatterers and ministers; and are brought to that, that when they would they dare not change them; they must go on, and defend cruelty with cruelty; they cannot alter the habit. It is then grown necessary they must be as ill as those have made them: and in the end they will grow more hateful to themselves than to their

subjects. Whereas, on the contrary, the merciful prince is safe in love, not in fear. He needs no emissaries, spies, intelligencers, to entrap true subjects. He fears no libels, no treasons. His people speak what they think, and talk openly what they do in secret. They have nothing in their breasts that they need a cipher for. He is guarded with his own benefits.

There is nothing with some princes sacred above their majesty ; or profane, but what violates their sceptres. But a prince with such a council [qu. counsel ?] is like the god Terminus of stone, his own landmark ; or (as it is in the fable) a crowned lion. . . . No men hate an evil prince more than they that helped to make him such. And none more boastingly weep his ruin than they that procured and practised it. The same path leads to ruin which did to rule, when men profess a license in government. A good king is a public servant.

A prince without letters is a pilot without eyes. All his government is groping. In sovereignty it is a most happy thing not to be compelled ; but so it is the most miserable not to be counselled. And how can he be counselled that cannot see to read the best counsellors, which are books ; for they neither flatter us nor hide from us ? He may hear, you will say ; but how shall he always be sure to hear truth ? or be counselled the best things, not the sweetest ? They say princes learn no art truly but the art of horsemanship. The reason is, the brave beast is no flatterer. He will throw a prince as soon as his groom. Which is an argument that the good counsellors to princes are the best instruments of a good age. For though the prince himself be of most prompt inclination to all virtue, yet the best pilots have need of mariners, besides sails, anchor, and other tackle.

It must be admitted that the royalism of this laureate is sufficiently tempered and allayed with rational or republican good sense to excite in the reader's mind a certain curiosity of conjecture as to the effect which might or which must have been produced on his royal patrons by the publication of opinions so

irreconcilable with the tragically comic form of idolatry embodied in the heroes and expressed in the rhapsodies of Beaumont and Fletcher. Amintor and Aëcius, Archas and Aubrey, are figures or types of unnatural heroism or preposterous devotion which are obviously and essentially wellnigh as far from Jonson's ideal of manhood and of duty as from Shakespeare's.

There is a quaint fierce touch of humour in the reflection that 'he which is sole heir to many rich men, having (beside his father's and uncle's) the estates of divers his kindred come to him by accession, must needs be richer than father or grandfather: so they which are left heirs *ex asse*' (sole heirs) 'of all their ancestor's vices, and by their good husbandry improve the old, and daily purchase new, must needs be wealthier in vice, and have a greater revenue or stock of ill to spend on.' But this is only one in a score of instances which might be quoted to show that if a great English poet and humorist had left nothing behind him but this little book of 'maxims,' as the French call them—notes, observations, or reflections cast in a form more familiar to French than to English writers—he would still hold a place beside or above La Rochefoucauld, and beside if not above Chamfort. And yet, even among his countrymen, it may be feared that the sardonic wit and the cynical wisdom of the brilliant French patrician and the splendid French plebeian are familiar to many who have never cared to investigate the *Discoveries* of Ben Jonson.

Again we meet the strangely outspoken satirist and malcontent in the person of the court laureate who allowed himself to remark that 'the great thieves of a state are lightly' [usually or naturally] 'the officers of the crown: they hang the less still, play the pikes in the pond, eat whom they list. The net

was never spread for the hawk or buzzard that hurt us, but the harmless birds; they are good meat.' But the critic of state consoles himself with a reflection on the precarious tenure of their powers enjoyed by such tenants or delegates of tyranny, and cites against them a well-known witticism of that great practical humorist King Louis XI.

The partially autobiographic or personal note which follows this opens and closes at once nobly and simply:

A good man will avoid the spot of any sin. The very aspersion is grievous; which makes him choose his way in his life, as he would in his journey. The ill man rides through all confidently; he is coated and booted for it. The oftener he offends, the more openly; and the fouler, the fitter in fashion. His modesty, like a riding-coat, the more it is worn, is the less cared for. It is good enough for the dirt still, and the ways he travels on.

No one will be surprised to find that Ben Jonson's chosen type or example of high-minded innocence, incessantly pursued by malice, delated and defamed but always triumphant and confident, even when driven to the verge of a precipice, is none other than Ben Jonson. His accusers were 'great ones'; but they 'were driven, for want of crimes, to use invention, which was found slander; or too late (being entered so far) to seek starting-holes for their rashness, which were not given them.' His profession also, as well as his person, was attacked: 'they objected making of verses to me when I could object to most of them their not being able to read them but as worthy of scorn'; and strove, after the changeless manner of their estimable kind, to back and bolster up their accusations and objections by falsified and garbled extracts, 'which was an excellent way of

malice ; as if any man's context might not seem dangerous and offensive, if that which was knit to what went before were defrauded of his beginning ; or that things by themselves uttered might not seem subject to calumny, which read entire would appear most free.' So little difference is there, in the composition of the meanest and foolishhest among literary parasites and backbiters, between the characteristic developments or the representative products of the seventeenth and the nineteenth century.

At last they would object to me my poverty : I confess she is my domestic ; sober of diet, simple of habit, frugal, painful, a good counsellor to me, that keeps me from cruelty, pride, or other more delicate impertinences, which are the nurse-children of riches.

All 'great and monstrous wickednesses,' avers the laureate—not perhaps without an implied reference to such hideous instances as the case of Somerset and Overbury—'are the issue of the wealthy giants and the mighty hunters : whereas no great work, or worthy of praise or memory, but came out of poor cradles. It was the ancient poverty that founded commonweals, built cities, invented arts, made wholesome laws, armed men against vices, rewarded them with their own virtues, and preserved the honour and state of nations, till they betrayed themselves to riches.'

It is hardly too much to say that there are few finer passages than that in Landor ; in other words, that there can be few passages as fine in any third writer of English prose.

The fierce and severe attack on worldliness and love of money which follows this noble panegyric on the virtues of poverty should be read as part of the same essay rather than as a separate note or



reflection. Indeed, throughout the latter part of the *Discoveries*, it is obvious that we have before us the fragments, disunited and disjointed, of single and continuous essays on various great subjects, rather than the finished and coherent works which their author would have offered to his readers had he lived long enough in health and strength of spirit and of body to carry out his original design. This sermon against greed of all kinds—avarice, luxury, ambition of state and magnificence of expenditure—is full of lofty wisdom and of memorable eloquence:—

What a wretchedness is this, to thrust all our riches outward, and be beggars within ; to contemplate nothing but the little, vile, and sordid things of the world : not the great, noble, and precious ? We serve our avarice ; and not content with the good of the earth that is offered us, we search and dig for the evil that is hidden. God offered us those things, and placed them at hand and near us, that he knew were profitable for us ; but the hurtful he laid deep and hid. Yet do we covet only the things whereby we may perish ; and bring them forth, when God and nature hath buried them. We covet superfluous things, when it were more honour for us if we could contemn necessary.

A little further on, the laureate who had lavished the wealth of his poetic invention and his scenic ingenuity on the festivities which welcomed the Danish king to the court of his brother-in-law refers in the following terms of sorrowful and sarcastic reminiscence to those splendid and sterile extravagances of meaningless magnificence :—

Have I not seen the pomp of a whole kingdom, and what a foreign king could bring hither ? all <sup>1</sup> to make himself gazed

---

<sup>1</sup> The current text reads 'Also' ! My emendation at all events makes sense of a fine passage.

and wondered at, laid forth as it were to the show—and vanish all away in a day. And shall that which could not fill the expectation of few hours entertain and take up our whole lives ? when even it appeared as superfluous to the possessors as to me that was a spectator. The bravery was shown, it was not possessed : while it boasted itself, it perished. It is vile, and a poor thing, to place our happiness on these desires. Say we wanted them all. Famine ends famine.

These reflections are uncourtly enough from the hand of a courtly poet ; but they are tame and tender if compared with his animadversions on ‘vice and deformity,’ which ‘we may behold—so much the fouler in having all the splendour of riches to gild them, or the false light of honour and power to help them. Yet this is that wherewith the world is taken, and runs mad to gaze on : clothes and titles, the bird-lime of fools.’

No man ever made more generous response to the friendly or generous kindness of others than Ben Jonson : no man had ever less disposition or inclination towards the grudging mood of mind which regrets or the abject mood of mind which resents the acceptance of a benefit. For all that he received of help or support from his wealthier friends or patrons he returned the noblest and most liberal payments in manly and self-respectful gratitude : he did not, like the rival poets of the restored Stuarts, condescend to undertake the deification or glorification of a male or female prostitute of parliament or of court : but it must be admitted that the outpourings of his heart in thanks and praises may seem somewhat excessive even to those who bear in mind that the tribute of his cordial homage was by no means confined to kings and princes, lords and ladies. But that ‘he would not flatter Neptune for his trident or Jove

for his power to thunder'—that he would not speak well, that he could hardly forbear from speaking evil, of any whom he found or whom he held to be undeserving—is as certain as that no loftier scorn than breathes through the words above transcribed was ever expressed by the most democratic or sarcastic of republicans for the mere attributes of rank and power. This fierce and deep contempt informs with even more vehement eloquence the note which follows :—

What petty things they are we wonder at ! like children, that esteem every trifle, and prefer a fairing before their fathers ; what difference is betwixt us and them, but that we are dearer fools, coxcombs at a higher rate ? . . . All that we call happiness is mere painting and gilt ; and all for money : what a thin membrane of honour that is ! and how hath all true reputation fallen, since money began to have any ! Yet the great herd, the multitude, that in all other things are divided, in this alone conspire and agree ; to love money. They wish for it, they embrace it, they adore it : while yet it is posset with greater stir and torment than it was gotten.

The pure and lofty wisdom of the next note is worthy of Epictetus or Aurelius :—

Some men, what losses soever they have, they make them greater : and if they have none, even all that is not gotten is a loss. Can there be creatures of more wretched condition than these, that continually labour under their own misery and others' envy ? <sup>1</sup> A man should study other things : not to covet, not to fear, not to repent him : to make his base such as no tempest shall shake him : to be secure of all opinion, and pleasing to himself, even for that wherein he displeases others : for the worst opinion, gotten for doing well, should delight us.

<sup>1</sup> That is, the envy they bear towards others : an equivocal, awkward, and affected Latinism. The writer would not—he never would—remember that a phrase or a construction which makes very good Latin may make very bad English.

Wouldst not thou be just but for fame, thou oughtest to be it with infamy : he that would have his virtue published is not the servant of virtue, but glory.

In the following satirical observation all students will recognise the creator of Fastidious Brisk—and rather, perhaps, the spirit of Macilente than of Asper :—

A dejected countenance, and mean clothes, beget often a contempt, but it is with the shallowest creatures ; courtiers commonly : look up even with them in a new suit, you get above them straight. Nothing is more short-lived than [? their] pride : it is but while their clothes last : stay but while these are worn out, you cannot wish the thing more wretched or dejected.

In the four notes which compose a brief essay on painting (or, as Jonson calls it, picture) the finest passage by far is this wise and noble word of tribute paid to another great art by a great artist in letters :—

Whosoever loves not picture is injurious to truth and all the wisdom of poetry. Picture is the invention of heaven, the most ancient, and most akin to nature. It is itself a silent work, and always of one and the same habit : yet it doth so enter and penetrate the inmost affection (being done by an excellent artificer) as sometimes it overcomes the power of speech and oratory.

The summary history of ‘ picture,’ or the art of painting, in which Jonson has given us his views on the relation of that art to poetry, geometry, optics, and moral philosophy, bears no less witness to his wide reading and his painstaking attention than to his quaint and dogmatic self-confidence in laying down the law at second hand on subjects of which he seems to have known less than little. But when we pass from criticism of painters to the lower ground of satirical observation—from the heights of a noble

art to the depths or levels of ignoble nature, we meet once more the same fierce and earnest critic of life who should certainly be acknowledged as the greatest of all poets by any one—if any one there be—to whom ‘criticism of life’ seems acceptable or imaginable as a definition of the essence or the end of poetry.

The opening of the satirical essay on parasites which is here divided or split up into two sections by the blundering negligence and the unprincipled incompetence of its editors has the force and the point of a keen and heavy weapon, edged with wit and weighted with indignation. Juvenal has hardly left us a more vivid likeness of the creatures who ‘grow suspected of the master, hated of the servants, while they inquire, and reprehend, and compound, and delate business of the house they have nothing to do with.’ This note ends with the admirable remark, ‘I know not truly which is worse, he that maligns all or that praises all.’ An eminent poet and dramatist of our own age, M. Auguste Vacquerie, has said much the same thing in words even more terse, accurate, and forcible than Jonson’s: ‘*Louer tout, c’est une autre façon de dénigrer tout.*’

What follows as part of the same note is a letter to a nobleman who had asked Jonson’s advice as to the education of his sons, ‘and especially to the advancement of their studies.’ The kindly and practical wisdom of his counsel is ‘not of an age, but for all time’: indeed, it is in some points as far ahead of our own age as of the writer’s. Though nature ‘be proner in some children to some disciplines, yet are they naturally prompt to taste all by degrees, and with change. For change is a kind of refreshing in studies, and infuseth knowledge by way of recreation.’ The old Westminster boy, who had paid such loyal homage



of gratitude to the 'most reverend head' of his old master, is as emphatic in his preference of public to private education as in his insistence that scholars 'should not be affrighted or deterred in their entry, but drawn on with exercise and emulation.' His illustrious namesake of the succeeding century was hardly more emphatic in his advocacy of the opposite principle. That which Samuel Johnson and Charles Kingsley considered as 'doubtless the best of all punishments' is denounced by Ben Jonson as energetically as by Quintilian: but I trust he would not have preferred to it the execrable modern substitute of torture by transcription—the infernal and idiotic infliction of so many hundred lines to be written out by way of penance.

Would we did not spoil our own children, and overthrow their manners ourselves by too much indulgence! To breed them at home is to breed them in a shade; where in a school they have the light and heat of the sun. They are used and accustomed to things and men. When they come forth into the commonwealth, they find nothing new, or to seek. They have made their friendships and aids, some to last their age. They hear what is commanded to others as well as themselves. Much approved, much corrected; all which they bring to their own store and use, and learn as much as they hear. Eloquence would be but a poor thing if we did but converse with singulars—speak man and man together. Therefore I like no private breeding. I would send them where their industry should be daily increased by praise; and that kindled by emulation. It is a good thing to inflame the mind, and though ambition itself be a vice, it is often the cause of great virtue. Give me that wit whom praise excites, glory puts on, or disgrace grieves; he is to be nourished with ambition, pricked forward with honour, checked with reprehension, and never to be suspected of sloth. Though he be given to play, it is a sign of spirit and liveliness, so there be a mean had of their sports and relaxations.

If the nineteenth century has said anything on this subject as well worth hearing—as wise, as humane, as reasonable, as full of sympathy and of judgment—as these reflections and animadversions of a scholar living in the first half or quarter of the seventeenth, I have never chanced to meet with it.

The forty-eight notes or entries which complete the sum of Ben Jonson's *Discoveries* should be considered as composing an essay on style, continuous in aim though desultory in treatment. The cruel, stupid, and insolent neglect of his editors has left it in so disjointed and dislocated a condition that we can only read it as we might read so many stray notes jotted down irregularly at odd moments on the first sheet or scrap of paper which might have fallen under the fatigued and fitful hand of the venerable poet. The very last entry is a repetition of a former remark and a former quotation, tumbled in by some blundering printer's devil with no reference whatever to the sentence preceding it.<sup>1</sup> As to the punctuation, let one example stand for many. 'Again, whether a man's genius is best able to reach thither, it should more and more contend, lift, and dilate itself.' To rectify this hopeless nonsense does not require the skill of a Bentley or a Porson. It is obvious that Jonson must have written 'whither a man's genius is best able to reach, thither,' etc. But the moles and bats who have hitherto taken charge of this great writer's text could not see even so simple and glaring a fact as this.

It is natural that Jonson should insist with some excess of urgency on the necessity for care and labour in writing :—

No matter how slow the style be at first, so it be laboured and accurate : seek the best, and be not glad of the froward

---

<sup>1</sup> Compare lxxii., *Not.* 4, and clxxi.

conceits or first words that offer themselves to us ; but judge of what we invent, and order what we approve. Repeat often what we have formerly written ; which beside that it helps the consequence, and makes the juncture better, it quickens the heat of imagination, that often cools in the time of setting down, and gives it new strength, as if it grew lustier by the going back. As we see in the contention of leaping, they jump farthest that fetch their race largest ; or as in throwing a dart or javelin we force back our arms to make our loose the stronger. Yet, if we have a fair gale of wind, I forbid not the steering out of our sail, so the favour of the gale deceive us not. For all that we invent doth please us in the conception or birth, else we would never set it down.

This extract is no exceptional example of the purity, force, and weight of style by which this essay is distinguished even among the works of its author. It is impossible for any commentator to convey more than a most imperfect impression of its rich and various merits.

Great as was Jonson's reliance on the results of training and study, he never forgot that 'arts and precept avail nothing, except nature be beneficial and aiding. And therefore these things are no more written to a dull disposition than rules of husbandry to a barren soil. No precepts will profit a fool ; no more than beauty will the blind, or music the deaf. As we should take care that our style in writing be neither dry nor empty, we should look again it be not winding, or wanton with far-fetched descriptions : either is a vice. But that is worse which proceeds out of want than that which riots out of plenty. The remedy of fruitfulness is easy, but no labour will help the contrary.'

Of Spenser, whom he seems to have liked no better than did Landor—in other words, no better than

might have been expected of him—he speaks here, on one point at least, in terms quite opposite to those recorded in Drummond's too sparing and irregular but delightful and invaluable notes. To the Scottish poet he said that 'Spenser's stanzas pleased him not, nor his matter': whereas in this later essay, while still insisting that 'Spenser, in affecting the ancients, writ no language,' he adds, 'yet I would have him read for his matter, but as Virgil read Ennius.' In his preference of Plautus to Terence, it may be observed that Ben Jonson anticipated the verdict of two such very different great men as Jonathan Swift and Victor Hugo:—

In the Greek poets, as also in Plautus, we shall see the economy and disposition of poems better observed than in Terence, and the latter [that is, in later comic dramatists], who thought the sole grace and virtue of their fable the sticking in of sentences, as ours do the forcing in of jests.

The Herculean energy and industry of Jonson might have been expected to make him as intolerant of indolence as he shows himself in the following fine passage:—

We should not protect our sloth with the patronage of difficulty. It is a false quarrel [*querela*, as the marginal title of this note expresses it] against nature, that she helps understanding but in a few, when the most part of mankind are inclined by her thither, if they would take the pains; no less than birds to fly, horses to run, etc.; which if they lose, it is through their own sluggishness, and by that means become her prodigies, not her children.

The whole of the section which opens with these noble and fervent words should be most carefully studied by those who would appreciate the peculiar character of Jonson's intelligence and genius. It may

be doubted, even by those who would admit that we learn best what we learn earliest, whether 'nature in children is more patient of labour in study, than in age ; for the sense of the pain, the labour of the judgment, is absent ; they do not measure what they have done. And it is the thought and consideration that affects us, more than the weariness itself.' Plato, we are reminded, went first to Italy and afterwards to Egypt in pursuit of Pythagorean and Osirian mysteries. 'He laboured, so must we.' From the examples of musicians and preachers, whose work requires the service of many faculties at once, this lesson may be drawn : 'if we can express this variety together, why should not divers studies, at divers hours, delight, when the variety is able alone to refresh and repair us ? As, when a man is weary of writing, to read ; and then again of reading, to write. Wherein, howsoever we do many things, yet are we (in a sort) still fresh to what we begin ; we are recreated with change, as the stomach is with meats. . . . It is easier to do many things, and continue, than to do one thing long.'

'A fool may talk,' as Jonson observes a little further on, 'but a wise man speaks' : and to such a man it will scarcely be questioned that we have been listening. But though 'it were a sluggish and base thing to despair' when the attainment of knowledge is possible, yet, 'if a man should prosecute as much as could be said of everything, his work would find no end.'

The next four notes deal more directly with special and practical details and principles of style. If some of the points insisted on seem either obsolete or obvious, there are others which cannot be too often asserted or too strenuously maintained. Silence may be golden on certain occasions ; but it is none the less



certain that 'speech is the only benefit man hath to express his excellency of mind above other creatures. Words are the people's, yet there is a choice of them to be made'; and the rules laid down for the limitation and regulation of this choice are as sound in principle as brilliant in expression. At every step we find something which might well be quoted in evidence of this:—

A good man always profits by his endeavour, by his help, yea, when he is absent, nay, when he is dead, by his example and memory. So good authors in their style: a strict and succinct style is that where you can take away nothing without loss, and that loss to be manifest.

The grace of metaphor in the following sentence 'is not more notable than the soundness of its counsel:—

Some words are to be culled out for ornament and colour, as we gather flowers to strew houses, or make garlands; but they are better when they grow in our style; as in a meadow, where though the mere grass and greenness delight, yet the variety of flowers doth heighten and beautify.

No modern student of letters will read this without seeing in it an anticipatory tribute to the incomparable style of Mr. Ruskin.

All the definitions of different styles are good, but this is excellent:—

The congruent and harmonious fitting of parts in a sentence hath almost the fastening and force of knitting and connection; as in stones well squared, which will rise strong a great way without mortar.

The reader of the following extract will be reminded at its close of an ever-memorable deliverance recorded by Boswell:—

Periods are beautiful, when they are not too long; for so they have their strength too, as in a pike or javelin. As we

must take the care that our words and sense be clear, so, if the obscurity happen through the hearer's or reader's want of understanding, I am not to answer for them, no more than for their not listening or marking ; I must neither find them ears nor mind.

All must remember how the second great dictator of literary London who bore the name of Johnson expressed the same very rational objection : ' I have found you a reason, sir ; I am not bound to find you an understanding.'

The following precept is of perennial value—and of perennial application :—

We should therefore speak what we can the nearest way, so as we keep our gait, not leap ; for too short may as well be not let into the memory, as too long not kept in. Whatsoever loseth the grace and clearness, converts into a riddle : the obscurity is marked, but not the value. That perisheth, and is passed by, like the pearl in the fable. Our style should be like a skein of silk, to be carried and found by the right thread, not ravelled and perplexed : then all is a knot, a heap.

Nor is this less weighty or less true :—

Language most shows a man. Speak, that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired and inmost parts of us, and is the image of the parent of it, the mind. No glass renders a man's form or likeness so true as his speech. Nay, it is likened to a man : and as we consider feature and composition in a man, so words in language ; in the greatness, aptness, sound, structure, and harmony of it.

The seven succeeding notes deal in more detail with various kinds of oratory ; ' high and great,' ' grave, sinewy, and strong,' or ' humble and low,' ' plain and pleasing,' or ' vicious' and bombastic, ' fleshy, fat, and corpulent—full of suet and tallow,' or ' bony and sinewy.' These notes are as full of

happy and humorous illustration as of sound and sensible criticism ; but it is a matter of more interest to consider the observations of such a man as Jonson on such men as Bacon and Aristotle. His reflections on the mediæval worship of a name are not unworthy of modern consideration :—

Nothing is more ridiculous than to make an author a dictator, as the schools have done Aristotle. The damage is infinite knowledge receives by it : for to many things a man should owe but a temporary relief and suspension of his own judgment, not an absolute resignation of himself, or a perpetual captivity. Let Aristotle and others have their dues ; but if we can make farther discoveries of truth and fitness than they, why are we envied ? Let us beware, while we strive to add, we do not diminish or deface ; we may improve, but not augment. By discrediting falsehood, truth grows in request. We must not go about, like men anguished or perplexed, for vicious affectation of praise ; but calmly study the separation of opinions, find the errors have intervened, awake antiquity, call former times into question ; but make no parties with the present, nor follow any fierce undertakers ; mingle no matter of doubtful credit with the simplicity of truth, but gently stir the mould about the root of the question.

The remarks ‘on epistolary style’ are rich in humour and good sense, as well as curiously illustrative of the singular fashion of the time. ‘Sometimes men make baseness of kindness,’ observes the writer ; and proceeds to illustrate the fact, in a manner which may remind us of Thackeray’s, by examples of absurd and verbose adulation, expressed in phrases ‘that go a-begging for some meaning, and labour to be delivered of the great burden of nothing.’

A word seems to have dropped out of the following admirable sentence ; but the beetle-headed boobies to whose carelessness the charge of Jonson’s

posthumous writings was committed by the malignity of accident were incapable of noticing the nonsense they had made of it :—

The next property of epistolary style is perspicuity, and is oftentimes [lost] by affectation of some wit ill angled for, or ostentation of some hidden terms of art. Few words they darken speech, and so do too many ; as well too much light hurteth the eyes as too little ; and a long bill of chancery confounds the understanding as much as the shortest note ; therefore let not your letters be penned like English statutes, and this is obtained.

Passing from the subjects of oratory and letter-writing to the subject of poetry, the laureate at once falls foul of his personal assailants. 'The age is grown so tender of her fame, as she calls all writings aspersions. That is the state word, the phrase of court—Placentia College, which some call Parasites' Place, the Inn of Ignorance.' That is a tolerably harsh phrase for a wearer of courtly laurels to allow himself ; but it is gentle and temperate compared with this effusion of divine wrath on the heads of victims now indiscernible and secure from fame or shame :—

It sufficeth I know what kind of persons I displease ; men bred in the declining and decay of virtue, betrothed to their own vices ; they have abandoned or prostituted their good names ; hungry and ambitious of infamy, invested in all deformity, enthralled to ignorance and malice, of a hidden and concealed malignity, and that hold a concomitancy with all evil.

The general and historical notes on poetry which follow are of less interest than they assuredly must have been if Jonson had given us less of Aristotle, Cicero, and Horace, and more of himself. It is

therefore less important to know what he thought of Euripides than to know what he thought of Aristotle:—

But whatsoever nature at any time dictated to the most happy, or long exercise to the most laborious, that the wisdom and learning of Aristotle hath brought into an art ; because he understood the causes of things : and what other men did by chance or custom, he doth by reason ; and not only found out the way not to err, but the short way we should take not to err.

‘ To judge of poets,’ says a later note, ‘ is only the faculty of poets ; and not of all poets, but the best.’ It is unlucky that in the note preceding it Ben Jonson should have committed himself to the assertion that Euripides, of all men, ‘ is sometimes peccant, as he is most times perfect.’ The perfection of such shapeless and soulless abortions as the *Phœnissæ* and the *Hercules Furens* is about as demonstrable as the lack of art which Ben Jonson regretted and condemned in the author of *Hamlet* and *Othello*.

It is comically pathetic to find that the failure of Jonson’s later comedies had led him to observe, with the judicious Aristotle, that ‘ the moving of laughter is a fault in comedy, a kind of turpitude that depraves some part of a man’s nature without a disease ’ : and likewise that ‘ this induced Plato to esteem of Homer as a sacrilegious person, because he presented the gods sometimes laughing.’ But this deplorable and degrading instinct of perverse humanity becomes irrepressible and irresistible in the reader who discovers in the author of *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Silent Woman* so delicate and sensitive a dislike of plebeian horseplay and farcical scurrility that he cannot at any price abide the insolence and indecency of so vulgar a writer as Aristophanes.



The concluding essay on 'the magnitude and compass of any fable, epic or dramatic,' is of less interest, except to special students, than the animadversions of the writer on more particular subjects of criticism. Constant good sense, occasional felicity of expression, conscientious and logical intensity of application or devotion to every point of the subject handled or attempted, all readers will find, as all readers will expect : and it should be superfluous to repeat that they will find a text so corrupt and so confused as no editor of any but an English classic would venture to publish.

And now it must be evident that if Ben Jonson was the author of Bacon's Essays—as that eminent Irish-American scholar, Dr. Athanasius Dogberry (of New Gotham, U.S.A.), maintains with a fervour not unworthy of Rabbi Zeal-of-the-Land Busy—his genius and his intelligence were by no means at their best when he produced that famous volume, and gave or sold it to his friend the Lord Chancellor. The full and fertile harvest of eloquence and thought, the condensed and compressed wealth of reflection and observation, overflowing on all sides from the narrow garner or treasury of the wonderful little book on which I have not hoped to write anything more than a most imperfect and inadequate commentary, may still be left unreaped and untreasured by the common cry of nominal students or lovers of English literature. But none who have studied it can fail to recognise that its author was in every way worthy to have been the friend of Bacon and of Shakespeare.

CONTEMPORARIES  
OF SHAKESPEARE



## GREENE, PEELE, AND LODGE

THE list which comprises the names of the very greatest among great poets or among men otherwise great can naturally never be a long one: briefer yet is the list of theirs who are only less great than these, and who first began the work or gave the example which none but they could follow, could complete, or could excel. Above all others enrolled in this latter list the name of Marlowe stands high, and will stand for ever. The father of English tragedy and the creator of English blank verse was therefore also the teacher and the guide of Shakespeare.

There is no such test of critical faculty and genuine instinct for true appreciation of poetry as the estimate given or accepted of Marlowe's place among poets. For his countrymen, at all events, there is none as yet, and probably there never will be. Most writers and most readers above the level of such as would do well to abstain and should in pity be prohibited from reading or from writing are much of one mind about Chaucer and Spenser, about Shakespeare and Milton, about Coleridge and Shelley. Those only who know and understand, as Pindar and as Dante would have expressed it, can hope or can be expected to appreciate the greatness of the man who began his career by a double and incomparable achievement: the invention of English blank verse and the creation of English tragedy.

It has not always been duly remarked, it is not now always duly remembered, by students of the

age of Shakespeare that Marlowe is the one and only precursor of that veritable king of kings and lord of lords among all writers and all thinkers of all time. The names usually associated with his by painstaking and well-meaning historians of dramatic poetry are hardly memorable or mentionable at all, except from a chronological point of view, among the names of dramatic poets. Lily, Greene, Peele, Nash, and Lodge were true though not great poets, who blundered into playwriting—*invitissima Minerva*—in search of popularity or of bread. Lily, Nash, and Greene were writers of prose which it would be difficult to overpraise if we had here to consider the finest work of Greene in romantic fiction, of Nash and Lily in controversial satire. Thackeray has given to the sweetest and loftiest verses of Peele the immortality which they could hardly have expected or attained, beautiful and noble and pathetic as they are, but for the more than royal dignity conferred on them by association with the deathless name and memory of Colonel Newcome. But their plays, though something in advance of the unreadable *Gorboduc* and the unspeakable *Lochrine*, have no particular claim to record among the trophies of our incomparable drama: they belong rather to the historic province of antiquarian curiosity than to the æsthetic or spiritual kingdom of English poetry. No man can be more grateful than I for the research of the learned and laborious historians whose industry has been devoted to the noble task of lighting up the dark ways of study for all future students of the highest, the wealthiest, the most precious and golden branch of a matchless literature. For all these illustrious scholars it was a matter of obvious and obtrusive necessity to register all surviving literary documents which belong to the



subject of their study. For a writer whose aim is confined to the indication and illustration of poetic and dramatic quality of imaginative or spiritual excellence the attempt would be worse than a superfluous impertinence : it would be an injurious aberration or excursion from the straight line of his intended labour.

Nash is always readable, even when religious : and something of the 'lightness and brightness' of his sunny and fiery spirit gives life to his fantastic little interlude of *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. The graceful author of *Rosalynde* is unrecognisable in Lodge's lamentable Roman tragedy *The Wounds of Civil War*. The *Selimus* and *Alphonsus* of Greene are feeble and futile essays in hopeless and heartless imitation of *Tamburlaine the Great* ; very bloody, very wordy, very vehement, but essentially spiritless and passionless. Had Shakespeare never retouched his *Titus Andronicus*, and earned by his surely slight and transient additions in Greene's own semi-lyrical style the shamefully famous expression of the dying man's undying rancour, that strangely fated play could hardly have been remembered except as the third in this trinity or triunity of rhetorical and rhapsodical horrors. The composition of *Orlando Furioso* is as pitifully scandalous as the story of its author's roguery in the disposal or venditation of his rubbish. *James the Fourth* is a comparatively creditable piece of work ; but its few, poor, meagre merits are noticeable mainly because of its date. There is something more of liveliness and coherence in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* : enough to exasperate the reader who can see what a far better and what a really charming work of realistic and fantastic invention might have been made of it—by the nameless author, for instance, of *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*. George a Greene

is an honest and homely expansion of a good old ballad into a passable if rather formless little play. It might savour of paradox to avow a preference for so tardy and so singular a survival of the old moralities as *A Looking-Glass for London and England*; but, if that preference is not perverse and capricious, no more final proof of the fact that Dr. Lodge and Master Greene (M.A.) ought never to have strayed or staggered on to the boards could possibly be exacted. For there is not only much to amuse the reader of this quaint and belated sermon in scenes, there is something for him to admire and enjoy. And it is a pity, if not a shame, that even the smallest and least precious jewel of poetry should have been misframed in so barbaric a setting.

Something of the same regret may probably or must surely be felt by readers of *The Arraignment of Paris*. That George Peele might and should have left a more honoured name among English poets than he chose or than he could manage to leave is painfully or pleasantly obvious when we compare the lovely lyrical and pastoral opening of this little courtly interlude with the weary and wordy commonplace of the rhyming and rhymeless verses that follow and fill out its five acts—‘tedious and brief.’ Quaint and pretty casualties or felicities of expression may be found here and there to relieve the general platitude of style and matter. The ‘oration’ of Paris in the fourth act is noticeable, if not memorable, as a decent exercise in blank verse when few could achieve anything better in that line than ‘untimely breathings, sick and short assays.’ But it has no more claim to be classed among plays or even among attempts at playwriting than any of Lily’s courtly allegories in dialogue; effusions or elaborations of devout and

decorous ingenuity with which a critic, or even a chronicler, of dramatic poetry or fiction has naturally no concern.

It is lamentable that neither Shakespeare nor Marlowe should have taken in hand so magnificent and suggestive a subject for historic drama as the reign of the greatest Plantagenet: it is deplorable that Peele should have ventured on it. Difficult and exacting as even the greatest among poets might or rather must have found it, that a man of any literary capacity whatsoever should have dropped upon the nascent stage an abortion so monstrous in its spiritless and shapeless misery as his villainous play of *Edward I.* is a riddle beyond and also beneath solution. There is hardly a passable line or couplet in all the vile expanse of its twenty-five chaotic scenes; the treatment of character and the handling of incident would be disgraceful to a child. The community in platitude of metre, baseness of spirit, and brutality of dullness, between the detestable scenes which do their bestial and futile utmost to pollute such names as Joan of Arc and Eleanor of Castile, may not suffice as thoroughly as we may wish they might suffice to establish the infamous identity of the author of *Edward I.* with the author of the Fourth Scene of the Fifth Act of *The First Part of King Henry VI.*; but at least it goes very far to confirm all rational English readers in their confidence that this villainy is the branding badge of but one minor poet—not of two curs, but of one cur. The heavy tumidity of *The Battle of Alcazar* is relieved by the really fine scene which reminded Lamb of Marlowe, and is rather honoured than disgraced by the kindly raillery of Shakespeare. The miserable traitor and apostate Stukeley would have had no more reason to thank

George Peele than to thank the anonymous author of a later play devoted to the commemoration of his misdeeds for the feeble attempt to present them as the achievements or attempts of a melodramatic megalomaniac. The soliloquy which closes the fourth act is matchless, I should hope, for drivel of desperation and platitude of bombast, in all the dramatic memorials of ambitious and hopeless impotence.

The scriptural tragedy of *David and Bethsabe* hardly deserves either the exuberant effusion of Campbell's praise or the all but unqualified scorn of other critics. It is a poor thing on the whole; yet there is the mark of a real though certainly not a great poet on the earlier scenes. But Voltaire's farce on the same subject, 'translated' with such adorable impudence 'from the English of Hume,' is much better worth reading and far more provocative of reperusal. Whether Peele is or is not responsible for the authorship of *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* is a matter which may be left for debate to the wise men of Gotham who question the authenticity of Shakespeare's part in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. I should hardly suppose that even this meanest among the precursors of Shakespeare must be credited or discredited with the production of so lamentable if not so belated an attempt to reopen 'King Cambyzes' vein.' The only redeeming point in all the narcotic or hypnotic rubbish is the sometimes rather amusing humour of the clown Subtle Shift—a not unwelcome survival of the Vice who gives occasional life to the mysteries and moralities which preceded the birth of tragedy or comedy in England as in France.

'These three gifted men,' Greene, Peele, and Marlowe, have been thus bracketed by such critics as in three hundred years' time may possibly chain

together the contemporary names of those three gifted men, Charles Mackay, Haynes Bayley, and Alfred Tennyson. It is shameful that it should not be (if it be not) superfluous to say that Marlowe differs from such little people as Peele and Greene, not in degree, but in kind ; not as an eagle differs from wrens or titmice, but as an eagle differs from frogs or tadpoles. He first, and he alone, gave wings to English poetry ; he first brought into its serene and radiant atmosphere the new strange element of sublimity. And, innovator as he was, revolutionist and creator, he was no less loyal and no less competent an artist, no less perfect and instinctive a workman in words, than Chaucer or than Spenser was before him. He had neither the boyish humour nor the childlike pathos of Chaucer : he had nothing of Spenser's incomparable melody and all but inexhaustible fancy ; but among all English poets he was the first full-grown man ; young indeed, and immature if set beside such disciples and successors as Shakespeare and Milton, but the first-born among us of their kind. Flutes and lutes and harps and harpsichords we had heard before the organ-music of his verse astonished and entranced all ears not naturally sealed against the higher strains of harmony, all hearts not religiously closed against the nobler tones of thought. And Shakespeare heard at once, and cast off shard by shard the crust of habit which fostered and sometimes fevered the jigging vein of his rhyming mother-wit, sweet and exquisite as it was ; and Milton long afterwards prolonged and magnified by reverberation the music of ' Marlowe's mighty line.' His place among poets is exactly as questionable as Dante's. M. de Lamartine thought little or nothing of Dante, and M. de Lamartine was once a very great poet indeed.



When such another champion assails the fame of Marlowe, it will be time for those who know better to undertake his defence.

The reviler of Shakespeare can be no other than a scurrilous buffoon, 'a decent priest where monkeys are the gods,' and where Ibsen is the idol. The anatomist of Shakespeare—the superior person who knows all about the weaknesses of that inferior nature, who can expound the qualities and define the influences which made him the man he was, and precluded him from the dubious chance of showing himself a greater and a stronger man than the soft, flaccid weaklings in whom his pitiful and unmanly ideal of heroic or philosophic manhood is so degradingly revealed—the thinker whose masculine intelligence can fathom Shakespeare's at a glance and dismiss it with a smile—is worthy to be classed and remembered as a representative man after the order of Archquack Emerson. Collier the cleric and Rymer the railer are dead and damned to something less, let us hope, than everlasting fame; pity may surely be allowed to believe in a briefer term of expiatory survival, a milder infliction of purgatorial remembrance, for their successors in the inheritance of contempt. '*Zoïle aussi éternel qu'Homère*'—what hardest of all hearts would not pity the case of Zoilus, eternally alive (or, in Browning's characteristically audacious phrase, 'immortally immerded') in 'the eternal cesspools' to which, when a living soul, he contributed all the irrepressible exuberance of effusive or explosive malignity which tortured what served him for a brain, and corroded what sufficed him for a heart? No other creature, alive or dead, can be quite so utterly and so hopelessly pitiable.

A much less incongruous and fissiparous trinity

or triunity of pre-Shakespearean playwrights would be revealed in the reunion of three associated names much less inharmonious than the copulation of Greene's and Peele's with Marlowe's. Greene, Peele, and Lodge hang very well together; three really good poets at their best, who can only have been whipped and spurred into scribbling for the stage by insanity of ambition or stimulation of hunger. The dullness of *The Wounds of Civil War* is so dense and malarious that it is difficult for a suffering reader to remember the existence of *Rosalynde*. Nothing more perfectly and absolutely worthless, or more difficult for patient application to dig through, has ever been reissued in the various reissues of Dodsley's *Old Plays*: stupendous as is the stupidity or perversity which has always ignored James Howard's really excellent comedy of *The English Monsieur*, and selected for infliction on modern readers a piece of noisome nonsense which must make his name a stench in the nostrils of the nauseated reader.

But enough or too much has before been written on this pigmy trinity of dwarfish dramatists. It is not with their names, it is with no such names as theirs, that poets or judges of poetry will ever associate the deathless name of Marlowe. To one man only did Shakespeare ever pay the tribute of a passing word—a word of honour, of regret, of admiration, and it might almost seem of affection. And to Marlowe alone it is that we can feel as though such a tribute had been due. But to him we may feel that it would be strange if not a word of homage had been offered, not a token of regard had been vouchsafed, by Shakespeare.

NOTE.—*The foregoing essay was the last prose composition completed by Swinburne before his death.*

## GEORGE CHAPMAN

THE fame which from his own day to ours has never wholly failed to attend the memory of George Chapman has yet been hitherto of a looser and vaguer kind than floats about the memory of most other poets. In the great revival of studious enthusiasm for the works of the many famous men who won themselves a name during the seventy-five memorable years of his laborious life, the mass of his original work has been left too long unnoticed and unhonoured. Our 'Homer-Lucan,' as he was happily termed by Daniel in that admirable *Defence of Rhyme* which remains to this day one of the most perfect examples of sound and temperate sense, of pure style and just judgment, to be found in the literature of criticism, has received, it may be, not much less than his due meed of praise for those Homeric labours by which his name is still chiefly known: but what the great translator could accomplish when fighting for his own hand few students of English poetry have been careful to inquire or competent to appreciate.

And yet there are not many among his various and unequal writings which we can open without some sense of great qualities in the workman whose work lies before us. There are few poets from whose remains a more copious and noble anthology of detached beauties might be selected. He has a singular force and depth of moral thought, a constant energy and intensity of expression, an occasional delicacy and perfection of fanciful or reflective beauty, which

should have ensured him a place in the front rank at least of gnostic poets. It is true that his 'wisdom entangles itself in overniceness'; that his philosophy is apt to lose its way among brakes of digression and jungles of paradox; that his subtle and sleepless ingenuity can never resist the lure of any quaint or perverse illustration which may start across its path from some obscure corner at the unluckiest and unlikeliest time; that the rough and barren byways of incongruous allusion, of unseasonable reflection or preposterous and grotesque symbolism, are more tempting to his feet than the highway of art, and the brushwood or the morass of metaphysics seems often preferable in his eyes to the pastures or the gardens of poetry. But from first to last the grave and frequent blemishes of his genius bear manifestly more likeness to the deformities of a giant than to the malformations of a dwarf, to the overstrained muscles of an athlete than to the withered limbs of a weakling.

He was born between Spenser and Shakespeare, before the first dawn of English tragedy with the morning star of Marlowe. Five years later that great poet began a life more brief, more glorious and more fruitful in proportion to its brevity than that of any among his followers except Beaumont and Shelley: each of these leaving at the close of some thirty years of life a fresh crown of immortality to the national drama founded by the first-born of the three. A few months more and Shakespeare was in the world; ten years further and Ben Jonson had followed. This latter poet, the loving and generous panegyrist of Chapman, was therefore fifteen years younger than his friend; who was thus twenty years older than Fletcher, and twenty-seven years older than Beaumont. All these immortals he outlived on earth,

with the single exception of Jonson, who died but three years after the death of the elder poet. No man could ever look round upon a more godlike company of his fellows; yet we have no record of his relations with any of these but Jonson and Fletcher.

The date of Chapman's birth is significant, and should be borne in mind when we attempt to determine his rank among the poets of that golden age. From the splendid and triumphant example of the one great poet whose popularity his earlier years must have witnessed, he may have caught a contagious love of allegory and moral symbolism; he certainly caught nothing of the melodious ease and delicate grace which gave Spenser his supremacy in the soft empire of that moonlight-coloured world where only his genius was at home. Chapman's allegories are harsh, crude, and shapeless; for the sweet airs and tender outlines and floating Elysian echoes of Spenser's vision he has nothing to offer in exchange but the thick rank mist of a lowland inhabited by monstrous hybrids and haunted by jarring discords. Behind Spenser came Sidney and the Euphuists; and in their schools neither Chapman nor any other was likely to learn much good. The natural defects and dangers of his genius were precisely of the kind most likely to increase in the contagion of such company. He had received from nature at his birth a profuse and turbid imagination, a fiery energy and restless ardour of moral passion and spiritual ambition, with a plentiful lack of taste and judgment, and a notable excess of those precious qualities of pride and self-reliance which are at once needful to support and liable to misguide an artist on his way of work.

The two main faults of the school of poets which blossomed and faded from the brief flower of court



favour during the youth of Chapman were tedious excess of talk and grotesque encumbrance of imagery ; and Chapman had unhappily a native tendency to the grotesque and tedious, which all his study of the highest and purest literature in the world was inadequate to suppress or to chasten. For all his labours in the field of Greek translation, no poet was ever less of a Greek in style or spirit. He enters the serene temples and handles the holy vessels of Hellenic art with the stride and the grasp of a high-handed and high-minded barbarian. Nevertheless it is among the schools of Greek poetry that we must look for a type of the class to which this poet belongs. In the great age of Greece he would have found a place of some credit among the ranks of the gnomic poets, and written much grave and lofty verse of a moral and political sort in praise of a powerful conservative oligarchy, and in illustration of the public virtues which are fostered and the public vices which are repressed under the strong sharp tutelage of such a government. At the many-headed beast of democracy he would have discharged the keenest arrows of his declamation, and sought shelter at need from its advance behind the shield of some tutelary Pittacus or Pisistratus.

What Pope said of Chapman's Homer may be applied with a difference to his original poetry ; it might not be inaccurate to say that he often writes, not indeed as Homer, but as Theognis might have written before he came to years of discretion. He shows, we must admit, only in a few couplets or brief paragraphs the pure and luminous charm of perfect speech proper to a Greek moralist of the elegiac school ; but he has more of a certain fire and force of fancy than we should look for in a poet of that order, where with far less of thick acrid smoke there is also

less real heat and flame perceptible than struggles here through the fume and fog of a Cimmerian style. The dialect of Chapman's poems is undoubtedly portentous in its general barbarism; and that study of purer writers, which might in another case have been trusted to correct and chasten the turgid and fiery vigour of a barbarian imagination, seems too often to have encrusted the mind with such arrogance and the style with such pedantry as to make certain of these poems, full of earnest thought, of passionate energy, of tumid and fitful eloquence, the most indigestible food ever served up to the guests of a man of genius by the master of the feast.

Under no circumstances, probably, would Chapman have been always a pure and harmonious writer, capable of casting into fit and radiant form the dark hard masses of his deep and ardent thought, of uttering the weighty and noble things he had to say in a fluent and lucid style; but as it was, he appears from first to last to have erected his natural defects into an artificial system, and cultivated his incapacities as other men cultivate their faculties. 'That Poesy should be as perval as oratory, and plainness her special ornament, were the plain way to barbarism': so he tells us at the very outset of his career, in a letter of dedication prefixed to the second of his published poems, and containing several excellent reflections on the folly of those who expect grave and deep matter of poetry to be so handled that he who runs or lounges need not pause or rouse himself to read.

'That *energia*, or clearness of representation, required in absolute poems is not the perspicuous delivery of a low invention; but high and hearty invention expressed in most significant and unaffected phrase.' That is admirably said; but when we turn

to the practical comment supplied by the poetry which illustrates this critical profession of faith, we find it hard to stomach the preacher's application of his text. In this same dedication, which is well worth note and regard from all students of Chapman—and with all his shortcomings we may reasonably hope that the number of them will increase, with the first issue of his complete works, among all professed students of English poetry at its highest periods—he proceeds to a yet more distinct avowal of his main principle ; and it is something to know that he had any, though the knowledge be but too likely to depress the interest and dishearten the sympathy of a reader who but for this assurance of design would probably have supposed that great part of these poems had been written in a chaotic jargon, where grammar, metre, sense, sound, coherence, and relevancy are hurled together on a heap of jarring and hurtling ruins, rather because the author wanted skill or care to write better than because he took pains to achieve so remarkable a result by the observance of fixed means for the attainment of a fixed purpose. It should seem to be with malice aforethought that he sets himself to bring to perfection the qualities of crabbed turgidity and barbarous bombast with which nature had but too richly endowed him, mingling these among many better gifts with so cunning a hand and so malignant a liberality as wellnigh to stifle the good seed of which yet she had not been sparing. 'There is no confection made to last, but is admitted more cost and skill than presently-to-be-used simples ; and in my opinion that which being with a little endeavour searched adds a kind of majesty to poesy is better than that which every cobbler may sing to his patch. Obscurity in affection of words and indigested conceits is pedantical and childish ; but

where it shroudeth itself in the heart of his subject, uttered with fitness of figure and expressive epithets, with that darkness will I still labour to be shadowed.'

This promise, we may add, was most religiously kept; but the labour was at least superfluous. To translate out of the crude and incoherent forms of expression in which they now lie weltering the scholastic subtleties and metaphysical symbols which beset the reader's diverted and distracted attention at every step through the jungle of these poems, and thus to render what he had to say into some decent order and harmony, he would have found a harder if a more profitable labour than to fling forth his undigested thoughts and incongruous fancies in a mass of rich inextricable confusion for them to sift and sort who list. But this, we see, was far enough from his purpose. He takes his motto from Persius :—

Quis leget hæc ? Nemo, hercule, nemo ;  
Vel duo vel nemo ;

and the label thus affixed to the forehead of one volume might have served for almost any other of his poems. His despair of a fit audience is less remarkable than the bitter and violent expression of his contempt for general opinion. 'Such is the wilful poverty of judgments, wandering like passportless men in contempt of the divine discipline of poesy, that a man may well fear to frequent their walks. The profane multitude I hate, and only consecrate my strange poems to those searching spirits whom learning hath made noble, and nobility sacred.' And this is throughout his manner of reference to the tastes and judgments of those common readers in whose eyes he took such less than little pains to make his work even passably attractive that we may presume

this acrid tone of angry contempt, half haughty and half petulant in its endless repetition, to have had in it some salt of sincerity as well as some underlying sense of conscious failure in the pursuit of that success on the image or idea of which he turns and tramples with passionate scorn. It is not usually till he has failed to please that a man discovers how despicable and undesirable a thing it would have been to succeed.

No student, however warm his goodwill and admiration for the high-toned spirit and genius of Chapman, will be disposed to wonder that he found cause to growl and rail at the neglect and distaste of the multitude for his writings. Demosthenes, according to report, taught himself to speak with pebbles in his mouth ; but it is presumable that he also learnt to dispense with their aid before he stood up against Æschines or Hyperides on any great occasion of public oratory. Our philosophic poet, on the other hand, before addressing such audience as he may find, is careful always to fill his mouth till the jaws are stretched wellnigh to bursting with the largest, roughest, and most angular of polygonal flintstones that can be hewn or dug out of the mine of human language ; and as fast as one voluminous sentence or unwieldy paragraph has emptied his mouth of the first patch of barbarisms, he is no less careful to refill it before proceeding to a fresh delivery. I sincerely think and hope that no poems with a tithe of their genuine power and merit were ever written on such a plan or after such a fashion as the *Shadow of Night* or *Andromeda Liberata* of Chapman. It is not merely the heavy and convulsive movement of the broken and jarring sentences, the hurried broken-winded rhetoric that seems to wheeze and pant at every painful step, the incessant byplay of incongruous digressions and impenetrable allusions,



that make the first reading of these poems as tough and tedious a task for the mind as oakum-picking or stone-breaking can be for the body. Worse than all this is the want of any perceptible centre towards which these tangled and ravelled lines of thought may seem at least to converge. We see that the author has thought hard and felt deeply ; we apprehend that he is charged as it were to the muzzle with some ardent matter of spiritual interest, of which he would fain deliver himself in explosive eloquence ; we perceive that he is angry, ambitious, vehement, and arrogant ; no pretender, but a genuine seer or Pythian bemused and stifled by the oracular fumes which choke in its very utterance the message they inspire, and for ever preclude the seer from becoming properly the prophet of their mysteries :—

We understand a fury in his words,  
But not the words ;

and the fury which alone we understand waxes tenfold hotter at our incompetence to comprehend what the orator is incompetent to express. He foams at the mouth with rage through all the flints and pebbles of hard language which he spits forth, so to say, in the face of ' the prejudicate and peremptory reader ' whose ears he belabours with ' very bitter words,' and with words not less turgid than were hurled by Pistol at the head of the recalcitrant and contumelious Mistress Tearsheet : nor assuredly had the poet much right to expect that they would be received by the profane multitude with more reverence and humility than was the poetic fury of ' such a fustian rascal ' by that ' honest, virtuous, civil gentlewoman.' The charge of obscurity is perhaps of all charges the likeliest to impair the fame or to imperil the success

of a rising or an established poet. It is often misapplied by hasty or ignorant criticism as any other on the roll of accusations ; and was never misapplied more persistently and perversely than to an eminent writer of our own time. The difficulty found by many in certain of Mr. Browning's works arises from a quality the very reverse of that which produces obscurity properly so called. Obscurity is the natural product of turbid forces and confused ideas ; of a feeble and clouded or of a vigorous but unfixed and chaotic intellect. Such a poet as Lord Brooke, for example—and I take George Chapman and Fulke Greville to be of all English poets the two most genuinely obscure in style upon whose works I have ever adventured to embark in search of treasure hidden beneath the dark gulfs and crossing currents of their rocky and weedy waters, at some risk of my understanding being swept away by the ground-swell—such a poet, overcharged with overflowing thoughts, is not sufficiently possessed by any one leading idea, or attracted towards any one central point, to see with decision the proper end and use with resolution the proper instruments of his design.

Now if there is any great quality more perceptible than another in Mr. Browning's intellect it is his decisive and incisive faculty of thought, his sureness and intensity of perception, his rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. To charge him with obscurity is about as accurate as to call Lynceus purblind or complain of the sluggish action of the telegraphic wire. He is something too much the reverse of obscure ; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity, or even to realise with what

spider-like swiftness and sagacity his building spirit leaps and lightens to and fro and backward and forward as it lives along the animated line of its labour, springs from thread to thread and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought woven from the inexhaustible stores of his perception and kindled from the inexhaustible fire of his imagination. He never thinks but at full speed ; and the rate of his thought is to that of another man's as the speed of a railway to that of a wagon or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway. It is hopeless to enjoy the charm or to apprehend the gist of his writings except with a mind thoroughly alert, an attention awake at all points, a spirit open and ready to be kindled by the contact of the writer's.

To do justice to any book which deserves any other sort of justice than that of the fire or the waste-paper basket, it is necessary to read it in the fit frame of mind ; and the proper mood in which to study for the first time a book of Mr. Browning's is the freshest, clearest, most active mood of the mind in its brightest and keenest hours of work. Read at such a time, and not 'with half-shut eyes falling asleep in a half-dream,' it will be found (in Chapman's phrase) 'pervial' enough to any but a sluggish or a sand-blind eye ; but at no time and in no mood will a really obscure writer be found other than obscure. The difference between the two is the difference between smoke and lightning ; and it is far more difficult to pitch the tone of your thought in harmony with that of a foggy thinker than with that of one whose thought is electric in its motion. To the latter we have but to come with an open and pliant spirit, untired and undisturbed by the work or the idleness of the day, and we cannot but receive a vivid and active pleasure in following

the swift and fine radiations, the subtle play and keen vibration of its sleepless fires ; and the more steadily we trace their course the more surely do we see that all these forked flashes of fancy and changing lights of thought move unerringly around one centre and strike straight in the end to one point. Only random thinking and random writing produce obscurity ; and these are the radical faults of Chapman's style of poetry. We find no obscurity in the lightning, whether it play about the heights of metaphysical speculation or the depths of character and motive ; the mind derives as much of vigorous enjoyment from the study by such light of the one as of the other. The action of so bright and swift a spirit gives insight as it were to the eyes and wings to the feet of our own ; the reader's apprehension takes fire from the writer's, and he catches from a subtler and more active mind the infection of spiritual interest ; so that any candid and clear-headed student finds himself able to follow for the time in fancy the lead of such a thinker with equal satisfaction on any course of thought or argument ; when he sets himself to refute Renan through the dying lips of St. John or to try conclusions with Strauss in his own person, and when he flashes at once the whole force of his illumination full upon the inmost thought and mind of the most infamous criminal, a Guido Franceschini or a Louis Bonaparte, compelling the black and obscene abyss of such a spirit to yield up at last the secret of its profoundest sophistries, and let forth the serpent of a soul that lies coiled under all the most intricate and supple reasonings of self-justified and self-conscious crime. And thanks to this very quality of vivid spiritual illumination we are able to see by the light of the author's mind without being compelled to see with his eyes, or with the eyes

of the living mask which he assumes for his momentary impersonation of saint or sophist, philosopher or malefactor ; without accepting one conclusion, conceding one point, or condoning one crime.

It is evident that to produce any such effect requires above all things brightness and decision as well as subtlety and pliancy of genius ; and this is the supreme gift and distinctive faculty of Mr. Browning's mind. If indeed there be ever any likelihood of error in his exquisite analysis, he will doubtless be found to err rather through excess of light than through any touch of darkness ; we may doubt, not without a sense that the fittest mood of criticism might be that of a self-distrustful confidence in the deeper intuition of his finer and more perfect knowledge, whether the perception of good or evil would actually be so acute in the mind of the supposed reasoner ; whether, for instance, a veritable household assassin, a veritable saviour of society or other incarnation of moral pestilence, would in effect see so clearly and so far, with whatever perversion or distortion of view, into the recesses of the pit of hell wherein he lives and moves and has his being ; recognising with quick and delicate apprehension what points of vantage he must strive to gain, what outposts of self-defence he may hope to guard, in the explanation and vindication of the motive forces of his nature and the latent mainspring of his deeds. This fineness of intellect and dramatic sympathy which is ever on the watch to anticipate and answer the unspoken imputations and prepossessions of his hearer, the very movements of his mind, the very action of his instincts, is perhaps a quality hardly compatible with a nature which we might rather suppose, judging from public evidence and historic indication, to be sluggish and short-sighted,



‘ a sly slow thing with circumspective eye ’ that can see but a little way immediately around it, but neither before it nor behind, above it nor beneath ; and whose introspection, if ever that eye were turned inward, would probably be turbid, vacillating, cloudy and uncertain as the action of a spirit incapable of self-knowledge but not incapable of self-distrust, timid and impenitent, abased and unabashed, remorseless but not resolute, shameless but not fearless.

If such be in reality the public traitor and murderer of a nation, we may fairly infer that his humbler but not viler counterpart in private life will be unlikely to exhibit a finer quality of mind or a clearer faculty of reason. But this is a question of realism which in no wise affects the spiritual value and interest of such work as Mr. Browning’s. What is important for our present purpose is to observe that this work of exposition by soliloquy and apology by analysis can only be accomplished or undertaken by the genius of a great special pleader, able to fling himself with all his heart and all his brain, with all the force of his intellect and all the strength of his imagination, into the assumed part of his client ; to concentrate on the cause in hand his whole power of illustration and illumination, and bring to bear upon one point at once all the rays of his thought in one focus. Apart from his gift of moral imagination, Mr. Browning has in the supreme degree the qualities of a great debater or an eminent leading counsel ; his finest reasoning has in its expression and development something of the ardour of personal energy and active interest which inflames the argument of a public speaker ; we feel, without the reverse regret of Pope, how many a first-rate barrister or parliamentary tactician has been lost in this poet.

The enjoyment that Browning's best and most characteristic work affords us is doubtless far other than the delight we derive from the purest and highest forms of the lyric or dramatic art ; there is a radical difference between the analyst and the dramatist, the pleader and the prophet ; it would be clearly impossible for the subtle tongue which can undertake at once the apology and the anatomy of such motives as may be assumed to impel or to support a ' Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau ' on his ways of thought and action, ever to be touched with the fire which turns to a sword or to a scourge the tongue of a poet to whom it is given to utter as from Patmos or from Sinai the word that fills all the heaven of song with the lightnings and thunders of chastisement. But in place of lyric rapture or dramatic action we may profitably enjoy the unique and incomparable genius of analysis which gives to these special pleadings such marvellous life and interest as no other workman in that kind was ever or will ever again be able to give : we may pursue with the same sense of strenuous delight in a new exercise of intellect and interest the slender and luminous threads of speculation wound up into a clue with so fine a skill and such happy sleight of hand in *Fifine at the Fair* or the sixth book of *Sordello*, where the subtle secret of spiritual weakness in a soul of too various powers and too restless refinement is laid bare with such cunning strength of touch, condemned and consoled with such far-sighted compassion and regret.

This last-named poem has been held especially liable to the charge which we have seen to be especially inapplicable to the general work of its author ; but although the manner of its construction should not seem defensible, as to me I may confess that it

does not, it would be an utter misuse of terms to find in obscurity of thought or language the cause of this perceptible defect. The point of difference was accurately touched by the exquisite critical genius of Coleridge when he defined the style of Persius as 'hard—not obscure': for this is equally true in the main of the style of *Sordello*; only the hard metal is of a different quality and temper, as the intellect of the English thinker is far wider in its reach, far subtler in its action and its aim, than that of the Roman stoic. The error, if I may take on myself to indicate what I conceive to be the error, of style in *Sordello* is twofold; it is a composite style, an amalgam of irreconcilable materials that naturally refuse to coalesce; and, like a few of the author's minor poems, it is written at least partially in shorthand, which a casual reader is likely to mistake for cipher, and to complain accordingly that the key should be withheld from him.

A curious light is thrown on the method of its composition by the avowal put forth in the dedication of a reissue of this poem, that since its first adventure on publicity the writer had added and had cancelled a notable amount of illustrative or explanatory matter, preferring ultimately to leave his work such a poem as the few must like, rather than such as the many might. Against this decision no one has a right to appeal; and there is doubtless much in the work as it stands that all imaginative thinkers and capable students of poetry most assuredly must regard with much more than mere liking; but when the reader is further invited to observe that the sole aim kept in sight, the sole object of interest pursued by the author was the inner study of an individual mind, the occult psychology of a single soul, the personal pathology

of a special intelligence, he has a right to suggest that in that case there is too much, and in any other case there is not enough, of external illustration and the by-play of alien actions and passions which now serve only to perplex the scheme they ought to explain. If it was the author's purpose to give to his philosophic poem a background of historic action, to relieve against the broad mass and movement of outer life the solitary process of that inward and spiritual tragedy which was the main occupation of his mind and art, to set the picture of a human spirit in the frame of circumstances within which it may actually have been environed and beset with offers of help, with threats and temptations, doubts and prospects and chances of the day it had on earth—if this were his purpose, then surely there is not here enough of such relief to illustrate a design which there is more than enough of it to confuse. But if, as we are now obliged to assume, the author's purpose was studiously and strenuously to restrict within the limits of inner spiritual study the interest and the motive of his work, to concentrate our attention with his own upon the growth and the fortune, the triumph and the failure, the light and the darkness of this one human spirit, the soul of a man of genius fallen upon evil days and elect for great occasions and begirt with strange perplexities, then surely there is here far too much of external distraction and diversion for the reader's mind even to apprehend the issue, much less to comprehend the process, of this inner tragic action. The poem, in short, is like a picture in which the background runs into the foreground, the figures and the landscape confound each other for want of space and keeping, and there is no middle distance discernible at all. It is but a natural corollary to

this general error that the body like the spirit of the poem, its form not less than its thought, should halt between two or three diverse ways, and that the style should too often come to the ground between two stools or more ; being as it is neither a dramatic nor a narrative style, neither personal nor impersonal, neither lyric nor historic, but at once too much of all these and not enough of any. The result may be to the hasty reader no less repellent than the result of obscurity in thought or in style ; but from identity of effect we are not to infer an identity of cause. The best parts of this poem also belong in substance always and sometimes in form to the class of monodramas or soliloquies of the spirit ; a form to which the analytic genius of Mr. Browning leads him as ever by instinct to return, and in which alone it finds play for its especial faculties and security against its especial liabilities to error and confusion of style ; a security for want of which his lyric and dramatic writing is apt to be neither dramatic nor lyrical, simply because of the writer's natural and inevitable tendency to analysis, which, by the nature of things as well as by the laws of art, can only explain and express itself either through the method of direct exposition or in the form of elaborate mental monologue.

The whole argument of the sixth book is monodramatic ; and its counterpart is to be sought in the most dramatic and to me the most delightful passage of equal length in the poem, the magnificent soliloquy of Salinguerra in the fourth book, full of the subtle life and reality and pathos which the author, to speak truth as it seems to me, too generally fails to transfer from monologue into dialogue, to translate into the sensible action and passion of tragedy, or adequately to express in fullness and fitness of lyric



form. The finest and most memorable parts of his plays not less than of his poems are almost always reducible in their essence to what I have called monodrama; and if cast into the monodramatic form common to all his later writings would have found a better if not a keener expression and left a clearer if not a deeper impression on the mind. For one example, the communing of old King Victor with himself on his return to the palace he has resigned is surely far more impressive and memorable to any reader than the rest of the play where his character is exhibited in the mutual action and reaction of dialogue among characters who seem unable to say rightly what they should say except when alone or secure from interruption. Even Chapman, from whom I may be thought to have wandered somewhat far in this inquiry as to what is or is not properly definable as obscurity, has in my judgment a sounder instinct of dramatic dialogue and movement than the illustrious writer who has carved out for himself in the second period of his career a new and better way to the end appointed by nature for the exercise of his highest powers: and Chapman was certainly not remarkable among the great men of his day for the specially dramatic bent of his genius.

I have dwelt thus long on a seemingly irrelevant and discursive inquiry because I could discover no method so fit to explain the nature of the fault I cannot but find in the poet of whom I have to speak, as by contrast of his work with the work of another, upon whom this fault has been wrongly charged by the inaccurate verdict of hasty judges. In answer to these I have shown that the very essence of Mr. Browning's aim and method, as exhibited in the ripest fruits of his intelligence, is such as implies

above all other things the possession of a quality the very opposite of obscurity—a faculty of spiritual illumination rapid and intense and subtle as lightning, which brings to bear upon its central object by way of direct and vivid illustration every symbol and every detail on which its light is flashed in passing. Thus in *Fifine* the illustration derived from a visionary retrospect of Venice, and in *Sordello* the superb and wonderful comparison of the mental action of a man who puts by for a season the memories in which he has indulged for a moment before turning again to the day's work, with that of a fugitive slave who thinks over in a pause of his flight and puts aside for more practical means of revenge the thought of enchantments 'sovereign to plague his enemies,' as he buckles himself again to the grim business of escape—these and other such illustrative passages are not more remarkable for the splendour of their imaginative quality than for the aptness of their cunning application and the direct light reflected from them on the immediate argument which is penetrated and vivified throughout by the insinuation and exploration of its radiance.

Few poets, on the other hand, have been more unsparing in the use of illustration than Chapman; he flings about similes by the handful, many of them diffuse and elaborate in expression, most of them curiously thoughtful and ingenious, not a few of them eloquent and impressive; but in many cases they tend rather to distract the attention of the reader than to elucidate the matter of his study. To his first poem, short as it is, Chapman appends a glossary to explain the accumulated allusions of a mythological kind, with this note at the foot of it: 'For the rest of his own invention, figures and similes, touching

their aptness and novelty, he hath not laboured to justify them, because he hopes they will be proved enough to justify themselves, and prove sufficiently authentical to such as understand them ; for the rest, God help them ' (for the poet evidently will not), ' I cannot do as others, make day seem a lighter woman than she is, by painting her.' The poem is, however, rich in fine verses which struggle into sight through the vaporous atmosphere of bombast and confusion ; it is thoughtful, earnest, eloquent, with interludes of mere violent and dissonant declamation, and rarer flashes of high and subtle beauty. The licentious grammar and the shapeless structure of sentences that break all bounds of sense or harmony are faults that cannot be overlooked and must be condoned if we care to get at the kernel underlying these outer and inner husks of hard language. The same comment may be applied to the poems which follow ; but the second Hymn, being longer and more discursive than the first, is more extravagant and incoherent, and its allegory more confused and difficult (whenever it is possible) to follow.

Whether or not there be as usual any reference to Elizabeth and her court under the likeness of Cynthia and her nymphs, or any allusion to English matters of contemporary interest, to perils and triumphs of policy or war, in the ' sweet chase ' of the transformed nymph Euthymia under the shape of a panther or a boar by the hounds of the goddess which pursue her into the impenetrable thicket where the souls of such as have revolted from the empire of Cynthia are held in bondage and torment, and whence the hunters who hew themselves a way into the covert are forced to recoil in horror, it is easier to conjecture than to determine : but the ' fruitful island ' to which

the panther flies and eludes the hounds who track her by scent should be recognisable as England, 'full of all wealth, delight, and empery'; though the sequel in which the panther, turned into a huger boar than that of Calydon, lays waste its 'noblest mansions, gardens, and groves' through which the chase makes way, may seem now more impenetrable to human apprehension than the covert before described. Leaving, however, to others, without heed of the poet's expressed contempt for our 'flesh-confounded souls,' the task of seeking a solution for riddles to us insoluble, we may note in this poem the first sign of that high patriotic quality which, though common to all the great of his generation, is more constantly perceptible in the nobler moods of Chapman's mind than in the work of many among his compeers. Especially in the reference of one elaborate simile to a campaign in the Netherlands, and the leadership of the English forces by

War's quick artisan,  
Fame-thriving Vere, that in those countries wan  
More fame than guerdon,

we trace the lifelong interest taken by this poet in the fortunes of English fighting men in foreign wars, and the generous impulse which moved him twenty-eight years later, at the age of sixty-three, to plead in earnest and fervent verses the cause of Sir Horatio Vere, then engaged 'with his poor handful of English' in the 'first act' of the Thirty Years' War<sup>1</sup> ('besieged and distressed in Mainhem,' Chapman tells us), in the ears of the courtiers of James I. A quainter example of this interest in the foreign campaigns of his countrymen may be found in the most untimely

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle's *Frederick the Great*, bk. iii. ch. xvi. ; vol. i. p. 329.

intrusion of such another simile into the third sestiad of *Hero and Leander*.

Before I take in hand the examination of Chapman's works as a dramatist, I may sum up the best and the worst I have to say of his earlier poems in the remark that on a first plunge into their depths even the reader most willing to accept and most anxious to admire the firstfruits of a poet's mind which he knows to have elsewhere put forth such noble fruit as Chapman's will be liable to do them less than justice until his own mind recovers from the shock given to his taste by the crabbed and bombastic verbiage, the tortuous and pedantic obscurity, the rigidity and the laxity of a style which moves as it were with a stiff shuffle, at once formal and shambling; which breaks bounds with a limping gait, and plays truant from all rule without any of the grace of freedom; wanders beyond law and straggles out of order at the halting pace of age and gravity, and in the garb of a schoolmaster plays the pranks of a schoolboy with a ponderous and lumbaginous license of movement, at once rheumatic and erratic. With the recovery will probably come a reaction from this first impression; and the student will perhaps be more than sufficiently inclined to condone these shortcomings in favour of the merits they obscure at first sight; the wealth of imagery, the ardour of thought and feeling, the grave and vigorous harmony of the better parts, and the general impression left on us of communion with a strong, earnest, high-minded man of genius, set adrift without helm or rudder; of lofty instincts and large aspirations that run rather to leaf than to fruit for want of an eye to choose their proper aim and a hand to use the means to it aright. The editor of the first and by no means



the worst English anthology has gathered from these poems, and especially from *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, large handfuls of fine verses, which when thus culled out and bound up into separate sheaves make a better show than in the text where they lay entangled among weeds and briars. There are beauties enough lost in this thick and thorny jungle of scholastic sensuality to furnish forth a dozen or so of pilfering poeticules with abundance of purple patches to be sewn on at intervals to the common texture of their style. It is with a singular sense of jarring admiration and irritation that we find couplets and quatrains of the most noble and delicate beauty embedded in the cumbrous ore of crude pedantic jargon : but those who will may find throughout the two earliest publications of Chapman a profusion of good verses thickly scattered among an overgrowth of bad. The first poem, however, which leaves us on the whole with a general and equable impression of content, is the small 'epic song' or copy of verses on the second expedition to Guiana. Here the poet has got clear of those erotic subtleties and sensual metaphysics which were served up at his 'banquet' in such clumsy vessels of the coarsest ware by the awkward and unwashed hands of an amorous pedant, soiling with the ink of the schools the lifted hem of the garment of love ; he has found instead a fit argument for his genius in the ambition and adventure of his boldest countrymen, and applied himself to cheer and celebrate them 'in no ignoble verse.' The first brief paragraph alone is crabbed and inflated in style ; from thence to the end, with but slight breaks or jars, the strong and weighty verse steps out with masculine dignity, and delivers in clear grave accents its cordial message of praise and good cheer.

At all times Chapman took occasion to approve himself a true son of the greatest age of Englishmen in his quick and fiery sympathy with the daring and the suffering of its warriors and adventurers ; a sympathy which found vent at times where none but Chapman would have made room for it ; witness the sudden and singular illustration, in his *Epicede* on the death of Prince Henry, of the popular anguish and dismay at that calamity by a 'description of the tempest that cast Sir Th. Gates on the Bermudas, and the state of his ship and men, to this kingdom's plight applied in the Prince's death.' It has been remarked by editors and biographers that between the years 1574, at or about which date, according to Anthony Wood, 'he, being well-grounded in school learning, was sent to the university,' and 1594, when he published his first poem, we have no trace or hint to guide us in conjecturing how his life was spent from fifteen to thirty-five. This latter age is the least he can have attained by any computation at the time when he put forth his *Shadow of Night*, full of loud and angry complaints of neglect and slight endured at the hands of an unthankful and besotted generation ; it is somewhat late in life for the first appearance of a poet, and the poem then issued is a more crude and chaotic performance than might be looked for from a writer who has no longer the plea of unripe age to put forward in excuse of the raw green fruits which he offers to the reader. Dr. Elze, in the learned and ingenious essay prefixed to his edition of Chapman's *Alphonsus*, points out that from the internal evidence of that play 'we are driven to the alternative either of supposing Chapman to have been in Germany or of allowing him a German partner' (p. 33), and a little before observes that 'there is

ample room between his leaving the university without a degree in 1576 or 1578 and his first acknowledged publication in 1594 even for a lengthened stay in Germany.' In default of evidence we might perhaps be permitted to throw out a guess that the future poet had in his youth seen some service and been possibly an eyewitness of some part of the campaigns in the Low Countries to which he refers in a manner showing his intimate acquaintance with the details of an action on the 'most excellent river' Waal before 'stately-sighted sconce-torn Nimiguen,' fought between the cavalry of 'the Italian Duke' and the English leader, Sir Francis or Sir Horatio Vere, who drew the enemy's horse, by a feint made with his own, into an ambuscade of infantry by which they were put to rout. Both the text and the note appended show a willingness to display this knowledge of the strategy and geography of the skirmish with some ostentation of precision; his parting remark at the end of the note has a tone of satisfaction in the discovery of a new order of illustration. 'And these like similes, in my opinion, drawn from the honourable deeds of our noble countrymen, clad in comely habit of poesy, would become a poem as well as further-fetched grounds, if such as be poets nowadays would use them.' He was not himself, as we have seen, over-careful to use them at the right moment or turn them to the most natural account; but to the principle here advanced he remained staunch in his later writings.

It may be thought somewhat out of keeping with the general reputation of Chapman as a retired student of a grave and sober habit of life that he should be supposed to have ever taken any active part in a military campaign; but those were days when scholars

and men of letters were not uncommonly found apt for employment in matters of war and policy, and gave good proof of a right to claim their place among other servants of the state for the performance of high patriotic duty ; nor, unless we please, need we imagine Chapman to have served personally as a volunteer in the English ranks ; but it is reasonable to conceive that either in person or by proxy he may have had special opportunities of studying the incidents of war in the Netherlands, which he would evidently have been mindful to make the most of and quick to put to use. It is also possible that his relations with the stage may have begun at an earlier date than has yet been traced ; and as we know that in 1585, when Chapman was twenty-six years old, Leicester brought over to Holland a company of actors in his train when he set sail as commander of the forces dispatched from England to the support of the States-General, and that others followed suit on their own score in succeeding years, those who are unwilling to allow him a chance of service as a soldier may prefer to conjecture that he was drawn to the seat of war by the more probable force of some poetic or theatrical connection with either the general's first troupe of players or that which followed in its track five years later. That these earlier adventurers were succeeded by fresh companies in 1604 and 1605, and again forty years later, at an unpropitious date for actors in England, eleven years after the death of Chapman, I further learn from an article in the *Athenæum* (Sept. 5, 1874) on Herr von Hellwald's *History of the Stage in Holland* ; and eight years later than the venture of the second company of players in 1590 we find Chapman classed by Meres among the best of our tragic writers for the stage, and repeatedly

entered on Henslowe's books as debtor to the manager for some small advance of money on future dramatic work to be supplied to his company.

In any case it is remarkable that his first play should not have been brought on the stage till the poet was thirty-six, or published till he was rising forty; an age at which most men, who might have written such a play at sixteen, would have been unwilling to expose it to the light. It is even a more crude and graceless piece of work, if we consider it as designed for the stage, than his first venture of the preceding year if we regard it as intended for the study. The plot is more childish, though the language may be purer, than we find in the rudest sketches of Greene or Peele, whose day was now well over; and even for the first-fruits of 'a person of most reverend aspect, religious and temperate, qualities rarely meeting in a poet,' it will be admitted that the moral tone of Chapman's two earliest comedies is not remarkably high. The first deals solely with the impossible frauds, preposterous adulteries, and farcical murders committed by a disguised hero who assumes the mask of as many pseudonyms to perpetrate his crimes as ever were assumed in Old or New Grub Street by a prudent member of the libellous order of rascally rhymesters to vent his villainies in shameful safety. The story is beneath the credulity of a nursery, and but for some detached passages of clear and vigorous writing the whole work might plausibly have been signed by any of the names under which a dunce of the order above mentioned might think it wisest to put forth his lyrics or his lies. In the better passages, and noticeably in a description of jewels engraved with figures of the gods, we catch a faint echo of the 'mighty line' in which Marlowe would lavish on such descriptions



the wealth and strength, the majesty and the fancy, of his full imperial style.

The frank folly and reckless extravagance of incident which appear to have won for Chapman's first play the favour of an audience not remarkable, it should seem, for captious nicety of critical taste and judgment, are less perceptible in his second venture ; but this also is a crude and coarse example of workmanship. The characters are a confused crowd of rough sketches, whose thin outlines and faint colours are huddled together on a ragged canvas without order or proportion. There is some promise of humour in the part of a Puritan adulteress, but it comes to little or nothing ; and the comedy rather collapses than concludes in a tangle of incongruous imbecilities and incoherent indecencies. The text is seemingly more corrupt than we find in Chapman's other plays, which are generally exempt from such gross and multitudinous misprints as deform the early editions of many Elizabethan dramatists ; their chief defect is the confusion and the paucity of stage directions. In the opening speech of *An Humorous Day's Mirth*, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth verse, we must supply with some such reading as this the evident hiatus of sense and metre in the fifteenth :—

But pure religion being but mental stuff,  
And sense, indeed, [being] all <sup>1</sup> [but] for itself,  
'Tis to be doubted, etc.

The text and arrangement of the scenes throughout this comedy require a more careful revision than has yet been given ; since if the crudest work of a man of genius is not to be rejected from the list of his

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps an adjective has here dropped out, and we might read the hemistich thus : ' all covetous for itself,' or ' careful,' ' curious,' ' gluttonous,' any of which words would fit the metre and suit the sense of the passage.

writings in which it has once found place, it claims at least so much of editorial care as may leave it in a reasonably legible form.

It appears that in the same year which gave to the press this loose and slipshod effort at a comedy, the most perfect of Chapman's plays, though not published till six years later, was completed for the stage. The admirable comedy of *All Fools* is the first work which bears full evidence of the vigorous and masculine versatility, the force and freshness of his free and natural genius. The dedication, which seems to have been cancelled almost as soon as issued, gives one of the most singular proofs on record of a poet's proverbial inability to discern between his worse and better work. The writer who ten years before was so loud in his complaint of men's neglect and so haughty in his claim on their attention for his crudest and faultiest work now assures the friend to whom he inscribes a poem of real excellence,

I am most loth to pass your sight  
With any such-like mark of vanity,  
Being marked with age for aims of greater weight  
And drowned in dark death-ushering melancholy :

but for fear of piratical publishers who might print 'by stealth' an unauthorised and interpolated edition 'without my passport, patched with others' wit,' he consents to 'expose to every common eye' what he calls

The least allowed birth of my shaken brain,

alleging as his excuse that 'of two enforced ills I elect the least'; and with this most superfluous apology he ushers in one of the most faultless examples of high comedy to be found in the whole rich field of our Elizabethan drama. The style is limpid and

luminous as running water, the verse pure, simple, smooth, and strong, the dialogue always bright, fluent, lively, and at times relieved with delicate touches of high moral and intellectual beauty; the plot and the characters excellently fitted to each other, with just enough intricacy and fullness of incident to sustain without relaxation or confusion the ready interest of readers or spectators.

The play and counterplay of action by which all the chief persons of the comedy trick and are tricked by each other in turn might easily have become perplexed or excessive in less careful and skilful hands; but the lightness and dexterity of handling which the poet has here for once manifested throughout the whole development of his dramatic scheme suffice to keep the course of the story clear and the attention of the reader alert without involution or fatigue: and over all the dialogue and action there plays a fresh and radiant air of mirth and light swift buoyancy of life which breathes rather of joyous strength and high-spirited health than of the fumes of 'dark death-ushering melancholy'; and as in matter of fact death was not ushered by melancholy or any other evil spirit into the stout presence of the old poet till full thirty-five years after the appearance and twenty-nine years after the dedication of this play, we may hopefully set down this malcontent phrase to some untimely fit of spleen from which, having thus given it vent, he soon shook himself clear and struck his pen through the record of it. I find but one slight and characteristic blemish worth noting in a comedy in which the proudest among his great compeers might have permissibly taken fresh pride; it is that the final scene of discovery which winds up the main thread and reconciles the chief agents of the intrigue is some-

what hurriedly dispatched, with too rapid a change of character and readjustment of relations, to make room for a thin-spun and wire-drawn sample of that tedious burlesque declamation with which the author was too prone to indulge a taste not likely to be shared or relished by his readers for the minute dissection of a dead jest, so dry that it crumbles into dust under the scalpel of the anatomist. All the rest of the comedy is so light, bright, and easy in all its paces that we are the less disposed to tolerate the stiffness and elaboration of this oratorical interlude. But this is really the only spot or patch I can discover on the jocund face of a delightful comic poem.

It is not impossible that the merit of pure and lucid style which distinguishes the best comedies of Chapman from the bulk of his other writings may in part be owing to the slighter value set by the author on the workmanship of these. By temperament and inclination he was rather an epic or tragic than a comic poet ; and in writing verse of a tragic or epic quality he evidently felt it incumbent on him to assert the dignity of his office, to inflate and exalt his style with all helps of metaphor and hyperbole, to stiffen the march of his metre and harden the structure of his language ; and hence he is but too prone to rely at need on false props of adventitious and barbaric dignity, to strut on stilts or to swim on bladders : whereas in writing for the comic stage he was content to forget, or at least to forgo, this imaginary dignity and duty ; he felt himself no longer bound to talk big or to stalk stiffly, and in consequence was not too high-minded to move easily and speak gracefully. It is clear that he set no great store by his comic talent as compared with the other gifts of his genius ; of all his comedies two only, *All Fools* and *The Widow's*

*Tears*, have dedications prefixed to them, and in both cases the tone of the dedication is almost apologetic in its slighting reference to the slight worth of the work presented ; a tone by no means to be ascribed in this case to a general and genuine humility, since the dedications prefixed to his various poems, and to two among his tragedies published under his own eye, are remarkable for their lofty and dignified self-assertion. The fact that of these two tragedies, one, *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, was apparently unsuccessful on the stage, and the other, *Cæsar and Pompey*, seems never to have obtained a chance of appearing on the boards at all, may naturally have moved the author to assert their right to respect and acceptance with more studied emphasis than usual ; in the earlier instance at least he is emphatic enough in his appeal from the verdict of the ' maligners ' with whom he complains that it met ' in the scenical representation,' to the ' approbation of more worthy judgments ' which ' even therein ' it did not fail to obtain ; and in the second case, though he appears to apologise for the lack of ' novelty and fashion ' in a play ' written so long since ' that it ' had not the timely ripeness of that age ' (seventy-two) ' that, I thank God, I yet find no fault withal for any such defects,' yet he is apparently and reasonably confident that the offering of his ' martial history ' is one honourable alike to poet and to patron. Both plays are rich in rhetorical passages of noble eloquence ; but in all points of workmanlike construction and dramatic harmony they are incomparably inferior to the better sort of his comedies.

The year of the publication of *All Fools* was memorable to Chapman for a more hazardous misadventure on a more serious stage than the failure of a comedy



on the boards, for which he had to thank the merited success of a play whose strange fortune it was to prove as tragical in its sequence as merry in itself, thus combining in a new fashion the two main qualities of Bottom's immortal interlude. All readers will remember the base offence taken and the base revenge threatened by the son of Darnley or of Rizzio for a passing jest aimed at those among his countrymen who had anticipated Dr. Johnson's discovery of the finest prospect ever seen by a native of Scotland ; none can forget the gallantry with which Ben Jonson, a Scot by descent, of whom it might have been said as truly as of the greatest in the generation before him that he ' never feared the face of man,' approved himself the like-minded son of a Roman-spirited mother by coming forward to share the certainty of imprisonment and the probability of mutilation with the two comrades who without his knowledge had inserted such perilous matter into their common work ; and many will wish with me that he had never borne a nearer and less honourable relation to a king who combined with the northern virulence and pedantry which he may have derived from his tutor Buchanan a savour of the worst qualities of the worst Italians of the worst period of Italian decadence. It was worthier of the great spirit and the masterful genius of Jonson to be the subject of his tyranny than the laureate of his court. Far more fitly, had such a one then been born, would that office have been filled by any scribbling Scot of the excremental school of letters who might have sought and found in his natural prince a congenial patron with whom to bathe his sympathetic spirit in the pure morality, while swimming with somewhat short strokes in ' the deep delicious stream of the Latinity,' of Petronius Arbiter. Such a Crispinulus

or Crispinaccio would have found his proper element in an atmosphere whose fumes should never have been inhaled by the haughty and high-souled author of the *Poetaster* ; and from behind his master's chair, with no need to seek for fear if not for shame the dastardly and lying shelter of a pseudonym which might at a pinch have been abjured, and the responsibility for its use shifted from his own shoulders to those of a well-meaning but invisible friend, the laurelled lackey of King James might as securely have launched his libels against the highest heads of poets to whom in that age all eyes looked up which would have looked down on him, as ever did the illustrious Latinist Buchanan against the mother of the worthy patron whose countenance would probably have sufficed to protect the meanest and obscurest creature of his common and unclean favour against all recrimination on the part of Shakespeare or of Jonson, of Beaumont or of Webster, of Fletcher or of Chapman.

The comedy thus celebrated for the peril it brought upon the ears and noses of its authors has of itself merit enough to have won for writers of less previous note a sufficient share of more enviable celebrity. It is one of the most spirited and brilliant plays belonging to that class of which the two most famous examples are *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Every Man in his Humour* ; and for life and movement, interest and gaiety, it may challenge a comparison even with these. All the actors in *Eastward Ho*, down to the very slightest, such as the drawer, the butcher's man, and the keeper of the prison, have some quality and character of their own which gives them a place in the comic action ; and in no play of the time do we get such a true taste of the old city life so often turned to mere ridicule and caricature by playwrights of less good humour,

or feel about us such a familiar air of ancient London as blows through every scene ; the homely household of the rich tradesman, the shop with its stall in front, the usurer's lodging, the waterside tavern, the Thames wharves, stand out as sharply as if etched by the pen of Dickens or the needle of Whistler. The London of Hogarth, as set before us in that immortal series of engravings for which he is said to have taken the hint from this comedy, does not seem nearer or more actual than this elder London of Jonson, Chapman, and Marston ; and the more high-flying genius of Frank Quicksilver is as real and lifelike as the humbler debauchery and darker doom of Tom Idle. The parts of Mistress Touchstone and Gertrude are worthy of Molière in his homelier mood ; and but for one or two momentary indecencies dropped here and there to attest the passage of Marston, the scenes in which they figure would be as perfect and blameless examples of pure broad comedy as any stage can show. The fluttering and exuberant ambition of the would-be Célimène or Millamant of the city is painted with such delightful force and freshness, her imperial volubility of contempt, the joyous and tremulous eagerness with which she obeys the precept of the Psalmist to ' forget her own people and her father's house,' her alternate phases of gracious patronage and overflowing obloquy, are so charming in the buoyancy and fertility of their changes that we are rejoiced when after the term of adversity so differently put to use by the prodigal daughter and the profligate apprentice Frank and Gertrude are alike restored to the favour of the excellent old citizen by the kind offices of his worthy son-in-law. Not only have the poets given proof of a gentler morality and a juster sense of justice than the great painter who followed long after in the

track of their invention, but they have contrived even to secure our cordial regard for the kindly virtues of the respectable and industrious characters whose aim it is to rise by thrift and honesty ; and we salute the promotion of ' Master Deputy's worship ' to the proud office of substitute for the alderman of his ward with a satisfaction which no man surely ever felt in the exaltation of Hogarth's Lord Mayor to sit in judgment on his luckless fellow. The figures of Gertrude's gallant knight and his crew of Virginian adventurers, whose expedition finally culminates in a drunken shipwreck on the Thames, are as vivid and as pleasant as any of these other studies ; and the scenes in which the jealous usurer is induced by the devices of Quicksilver and Sir Petronel to bring his disguised wife into the company of her paramour and reassure her supposed scruples with his pithy arguments against conjugal fidelity, while he lets fly at her supposed husband the well-worn jests which recoil on his own head, have in them enough of wit and humorous invention to furnish forth the whole five acts of an ordinary comedy of intrigue. Even in these sketches from the prosaic life of their day the great and generous poets of that age were as prodigal of the riches of their genius as in the tragic and romantic work of their higher moods. The style of Chapman is perceptible in some of the best of these scenes in the third act as well as in the moral passage of metrical philosophy put into the lips of the half-drowned Quicksilver in the fourth, where only the last editor has taken note of his handiwork.

Two allusions in the mouth of the usurer, one to ' the ship of famous Draco,' and one to the camel's horns of which we hear something too often from this poet, are in the unmistakable manner of Chapman.

Other such points might perhaps be discovered ; but on the whole we may probably feel safe in assigning to each of the three associates as equal a share in the labour and the credit as they bore in the peril entailed on them by a comedy which, though disclaiming all unfriendly aim at rivalry with one of similar title already familiar to the stage, must probably and deservedly have eclipsed the success of two plays not published till two years later under cognate names by Decker and Webster ; though the plot of *Northward Ho* is not wanting in humour and ingenuity, and in *Westward Ho* there is one scene of exquisite and incongruous beauty in which we recognise at once the tender and reckless hand which five years earlier had inserted into the yet more inappropriate framework of the *Satiromastix* as sweet an episode of seeming martyrdom and chastity secured under the shelter of a sleep like death.

In his next play Chapman reassumed the more poetical style of comedy which in *Eastward Ho* had been put off for the plainer garb of realism. *The Gentleman Usher* is distinguishable from all his other works by the serious grace and sweetness of the love-scenes, and the higher tone of feminine character and masculine regard which is sustained throughout the graver passages. Elsewhere it should seem that Chapman had scorned to attempt or failed to achieve the task of rousing and retaining the chief interest of his reader in the fortune of two young lovers ; but in this play he has drawn such a passionate and innocent couple with singular tenderness and delicacy. The broader effects of humour are comic enough, though perhaps somewhat too much prolonged and too often repeated ; but the charm of the play lies in the bright and pure quality of its romantic part. The scene in



which the prince and Margaret, debarred by tyranny and intrigue from the right of public marriage, espouse each other in secret by a pretty ceremony devised on the spot, in a dialogue of the wounded Strozza with the wife who has restored him to spiritual strength by 'the sweet food of her divine advice,' are models of the simple, luminous, and fervent style of poetry proper to romantic comedy at its highest. A noble passage in the fifth act of this play contains, as far as I know, the first direct protest against the principle of monarchy to be found in our poetical or dramatic literature; his last year's hazardous experience of royal susceptibilities may not improbably have given edge to the author's pen as it set down these venturous lines in a time when as yet no king had been taught, in the phrase of old Lord Auchinleck, that he had a joint in his neck:—

And what 's a prince ? Had all been virtuous men,  
There never had been prince upon the earth,  
And so no subject : all men had been princes.  
A virtuous man is subject to no prince,  
But to his soul and honour ; which are laws  
That carry fire and sword within themselves,  
Never corrupted, never out of rule :  
What is there in a prince that his least lusts  
Are valued at the lives of other men,  
When common faults in him should prodigies be,  
And his gross dotage rather loathed than soothed ?

I should be surprised to find in any poet of Chapman's age an echo of such clear and daring words as these, which may suffice to show that the oligarchic habit of mind to which I have before referred in him was the fruit of no sycophantic temper, no pliant and prostitute spirit, the property of a courtier or a courtesan, but sprung rather from pure intellectual

haughtiness and a contempt for the mob of minds. Nevertheless it is well worth remark that such a deliberate utterance of republican principle should then have been endured on the stage ; that so loud a blast of direct challenge to the dominant superstition of the day should have been blown so near the court in the ears of a popular audience by a poet who, though at no time chargeable with any stain of venal or parasitic servility, was afterwards the habitual and grateful recipient of patronage from princes and favourites, and at all times, it must be confessed, in all his other works a strenuous and consistent supporter of the tradition of royalty against the conception of democracy.

The opening scene of *Monsieur d'Olive*, the next on the list of Chapman's comedies, is one of the most admirable in any play. More than once indeed the author has managed his overture, or what in the classic dialect of the old French stage was called the exposition, with a skill and animation giving promise of better things to come than he has provided ; as though he had spent the utmost art his genius could command in securing the interest of his audience at the first start, and then left it for chance to support, letting his work float at will on the lazy waters of caprice or negligence. No more impressive introduction to a play could have been devised than the arrival of the chief person, newly landed in high hopes and spirits from a long voyage, before the closed gates and curtained casements of an old friend's house, within which tapers are burning at noon, and before which the master walks sadly up and down, and repels his proffered embrace ; and the whole scene following which explains the trouble of one household and the mourning of another is a model of clear,

natural, dignified dialogue, in which every word is harmonious, appropriate, and noble. The grace and interest of this exposition are more or less well sustained during the earlier part of the play ; but as the underplot opens out at greater length, the main interest is more and more thrust aside, cramped as it were for space and squeezed out of shape, till at last it is fairly hustled into a corner of the action to make way for the overwrought fooleries of the gull d'Olive and the courtiers who play upon his vanity ; and this underplot, diverting enough in a slight way for one or two scenes, is stretched out on the tenterhooks of farcical rhetoric and verbose dialogue till the reader finds himself defrauded of the higher interest which he was led to expect, and wearied of the empty substitute which the waywardness or indolence of the author has chosen to palm off on him in its stead. Towards the end indeed there is a profuse waste of good points and promising possibilities ; the humorous ingenuity of the devices so well contrived to wind up together and in order the double thread of the main plot is stinted of room to work in and display its excellent quality of invention, and the final scene, which should have explained and reconciled all doubts and errors at large with no less force and fullness of careful dramatic capacity than was employed upon their exposition, is hastily patched up and slurred over to leave place for a last superfluous exhibition of such burlesque eloquence as had already been admitted to encumber the close of another comedy, more perfect than this in construction, but certainly not more interesting in conception. In spite, however, of this main blemish in the action, *Monsieur d'Olive* may properly be counted among the more notable and successful plays of Chapman.

Of his two remaining comedies I may as well say a word here as later. *Mayday*, which was printed five years after the two last we have examined, is full of the bustle and jumble of intrigue which may be expected in such comedies of incident as depend rather on close and crowded action than on fine or forcible character for whatever they may merit of success. There is no touch in it of romance or poetical interest, but several of the situations and dialogues may have credit for some share of vigour and humour. But of these qualities Chapman gave much fuller proof next year in the unchivalrous comedy of *The Widow's Tears*. This discourteous drama is as rich in comic force as it is poor in amiable sentiment. There is a brutal exuberant fun throughout the whole action which finds its complete expression and consummation in the brawny gallantry and muscular merriment of Tharsalio. A speculative commentator might throw out some conjecture to the effect that the poet at fifty-three may have been bent on revenge for a slight offered to some unseasonable courtship of his own by a lady less amenable to the proffer of future fame than the 'belle marquise' who has the credit for all time to come of having lent a humble ear to the haughty suit and looked with a gracious eye on the grey hairs of the great Corneille. But whether this keen onslaught on the pretensions of the whole sex to continence or constancy were or were not instigated by any individual rancour, the comedy is written with no little power and constructed with no little ingenuity; the metrical scenes are pure and vigorous in style, and the difficulty of fitting such a story to the stage is surmounted with scarcely less of dexterity than of daring. The action of the last scene is again hampered by the intrusion of forced and

misplaced humours, and while the superfluous underlings of the play are breaking and bandying their barren jests, the story is not so much wound up as huddled up in whispers and by-play ; but it may certainly be pleaded in excuse of the poet that the reconciliation of the Ephesian matron to her husband was a somewhat difficult ceremony to exhibit at length and support with any plausible or effectual explanation.

Two other titles are usually found in the catalogue of Chapman's extant comedies ; but it seems to me as difficult to discover any trace of Chapman in the comedy of *The Ball* as of Shirley in the tragedy of *Chabot*. These two plays were issued by the same printer in the same year for the same publishers, both bearing the names of Chapman and Shirley linked together in the bonds of a most incongruous union : but I know not if there be any further ground for belief in this singular association. The mere difference in age would make the rumour of a collaboration between the eldest of old English dramatists and the latest disciple of their school so improbable as to demand the corroboration of some trustworthier authority than a bookseller's title-page bearing date five years after the death of Chapman. In the very next year a play was published under the name of Fletcher, who had then been fifteen years dead ; this play was afterwards reclaimed by Shirley as the work of his own hand, and of his alone ; nor is there any doubt that Fletcher had not a finger in it. Of the authorship of *Chabot* there can be no question ; the subject, the style, the manner, the metre, the construction, the characters, all are perfectly Chapman's. *The Ball*, on the other hand, is as thoroughly in the lightest style of Shirley, and not a bad example of



his airily conventional manner ; it is lively and easy enough, but much below the mark of his best comedies, such as *The Lady of Pleasure* (where an allusion to this earlier play is brought into the dialogue), which but for a single ugly incongruity would be one of the few finest examples of pure high comedy in verse that our stage could show against that of Molière. A foundling of yet more dubious parentage has been fathered upon Chapman by the tradition which has affixed to his name the putative paternity of ' a comical moral censuring the follies of this age,' anonymously published in his sixty-first year. It has been plausibly suggested that the title of this wonderful medley, *Two Wise Men and all the rest Fools*, was the first and last cause of its attribution to the hand of Chapman, and that the error arose from a confusion of this with the title of *All Fools*, the best of Chapman's comedies. In any case it is difficult to believe that this voluminous pamphlet in the form of dialogue on social questions can have been the work of any practised or professional dramatist. It is externally divided into seven acts, and might as reasonably have been divided into twenty-one. A careful and laborious perusal of the bulky tract from prologue to epilogue, which has enabled me in some measure to appreciate the double scientific experiment of Mr. Browning on ' Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis,' emboldens me also to affirm that it has no vestige of dramatic action, no trace of a story, no phantom of a plot ; that the reader who can believe the assertion of its title-page that it was ' divers times ' or indeed ever ' acted ' on any mortal stage by any human company before any living audience will have a better claim to be saved by his faith than the author by this sample at least of his works ; that it contains much curious and sometimes

amusing detail on social matters of the day, and is not wanting in broad glimpses or intervals of somewhat clownish humour. In the strong coarse satire on female Puritanism those who will may discern touches which recall the tone if not the handiwork of the author of *An Humorous Day's Mirth*. The fact that several names occurring in the course of the dialogue, though not in the long list of marvellously labelled interlocutors, are anagrams of the simplest kind, being merely common English names spelt backwards, may be thought to indicate some personal aim in this elaborate onslaught on usurers, money-lenders, brokers, and other such cattle ; and if so we have certainly no right to lay an anonymous attack of the kind, even upon such as these, to the charge of a poet who, so far as we know, never published a line in his long life that he feared to subscribe with his own loyal and honourable name. Such a one is not lightly to be suspected of the least approach in form or substance to the dirty tactics of a verminous pseudonymuncle, who at the risk of being ultimately shamed into avowal or scared into denial of his ignominious individuality may prefer for one rascally moment the chance of infamy as a slanderer to the certitude of obscurity as a scribbler.

Although, however, we may be inclined to allow no great weight to the tradition current fifty-seven years after the death of Chapman, which according to Langbaine was at that date the only authority that led him to believe in the general vague ascription of this work to the poet under whose name it has ever since found a questionable place in the corners of catalogues at the tail of his authentic comedies, the very fact of this early attribution gives it a certain external interest of antiquarian curiosity, besides that

which it may fairly claim as a quaint example of controversial dialectics on the conservative side. The dialogues are not remarkable either for Platonic skill or for Platonic urbanity ; for which reason they may probably be accepted with the more confidence as fairly expressive of the average of opinion then afloat among honest English citizens of the middle class, jealous of change, suspicious of innovation, indignant at the sight of rascality which they were slow to detect, much given to growl and wail over the decay of good old times and the collapse of good old landmarks, the degeneracy of modern manners, and the general intolerability of things in an age of hitherto unknown perversity ; men of heavy-headed patience and heavy-witted humour, but by no means the kind of cattle that it would be safe for any driver to goad or load overmuch. The writer may be taken as an exponent of Anglican conservatism if not of Catholic reaction in matters of religious doctrine and discipline ; he throws his whole strength as a dialectician (which is not Herculean, or quite equal to his evident goodwill) into the discussion of a proposal to secularise the festivals and suppress the holidays appointed by the Church ; and the ground of his defence is not popular but clerical ; these holidays are to be observed not for the labourer's but for the saint's sake ; and above all because our wiser forefathers have so willed it, for reasons which we are in duty bound to take on trust as indisputably more valid than any reasoning of our own. He has a hearty distrust of lawyers and merchants, and a cordial distaste for soldiers and courtiers ; his sentiments towards a Puritan are those of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, his opinion of an agitator is worthy of a bishop, and his view of a demagogue would do honour to a duke.

A very different work from the effusion of this worthy pamphleteer bears likewise, or at least has once borne, the dubious name of Chapman. This is a tragic or romantic drama without a title of its own, labelled it should seem for the sake of convenience by the licencer of plays as a 'second Maiden's Tragedy.' It was first printed in 1824 with a brief note of introduction, from which we learn that the manuscript was originally inscribed with the name of William Goughe; that Thomas was then substituted for William, while a third Goughe, Robert, seems to have figured as one of the principal actors; that a second correction struck out either Goughe at one sweep of the pen, and supplanted both names by that of George Chapman; and that last of all this also was erased to make way for no less a claimant than William Shakespeare. To this late and impudent attempt at imposture no manner of notice need be accorded; but the claim preferred for Chapman deserves some attention from all students of our dramatic poetry. In style and metre this play, which bears the date of his fifty-third year (1611), is noticeably different from all his acknowledged tragedies, one only excepted; but it is not more different from the rest than this one, which, though not published till twenty years after the death of Chapman, has never yet been called in question as a dubious or spurious pretender to the credit of his authorship. And if, as I am unwilling to disbelieve, Chapman was actually the author of *Revenge for Honour*, one serious obstacle is cleared out of the way of our belief in the justice of the claim advanced for him to this play also.

Not that the two can be said to show many or grave points of likeness to each other; but between all other tragedies assigned to Chapman such points of intimate

resemblance do undoubtedly appear, while the points of unlikeness between any one of these and either of the plays in question are at once as many and as grave. Of the posthumous tragedy I purpose to say a word in its turn ; meantime we may observe that it is not easy to conjecture any motive of interest which might have induced a forger of names to attribute an illegitimate issue of this kind to Chapman rather than to another. His name was probably never one of those whose popularity would have sufficed to float the doubtful venture of a spurious play. To Shakespeare or to Fletcher it was of course a profitable speculation for knavish booksellers to assign the credit or discredit of any dramatic bantling which they might think it but barely possible to leave undetected at the door of such a foster-father, or to pass off for a time on the thickest-witted of his admirers as a sinful slip of the great man's grafting in his idler hours of human infirmity. But if there was in effect no plea for the intrusion of such a changeling into the poetic household of Chapman, whose quiver was surely full enough without the insertion of a stranger's shaft, the gratuitous selection of this poet as sponsor for this play appears to me simply unaccountable. No plausible reason can as far as I see be assigned for the superscription of Chapman's name in place of the cancelled name of Goughe, unless the writer did actually believe that the genuine work of George Chapman had been wrongly ascribed to Thomas or William Goughe ; whereas no reader of the play will imagine it possible that the name of Shakespeare can have been substituted in good faith and singleness of heart by a corrector honestly desirous of repairing a supposed error.

Again, if the doubtless somewhat fragile claim of Chapman be definitely rejected, we find hitherto no



other put forward to take its place. The author of *Death's Jest-book*, in that brilliant correspondence on poetical questions which to me gives a higher view of his fine and vigorous intelligence than any other section of his literary remains, reasonably refuses to admit a suggestion that the authorship of this nameless and fatherless poem might be ascribed to Massinger. 'The poisoning and painting is like him, but also like Cyril Tourneur; and it is too poetical for old Philip.' He might have added that it is also far too loose and feeble in construction for the admirable artist of whom Coleridge so justly remarked that his plays have the interest of novels; but Beddoes, whose noble instinct for poetry could never carry him in practice beyond the production of a few lofty and massive fragments of half-formed verse which stand better by themselves when detached from the incoherent and disorderly context, was apparently as incapable of doing justice to the art of Massinger as of reducing under any law of harmony to any fitness of form his own chaotic and abortive conceptions of a plot; for the most faithful admirer of that genius which is discernible beyond mistake in certain majestic passages of his blank verse must admit that his idea of a play never passed beyond the embryonic stage of such an organism as that upon which he conferred the gift of lyric utterance in his best and favourite song, and that his hapless dramatic offspring was never and could never have been more than 'a bodiless childful of life in the gloom, Crying with frog voice, What shall I be?'

Perhaps too for him the taint of Gifford's patronage was still on Massinger, and the good offices of that rancorous pedant may have inclined him to undervalue the worth of a poet announced and accompanied by

the proclamation of such a herald. This connection, fortunate as in one way it was for the dramatist to whose works it secured for ever a good and trustworthy text admirably edited and arranged, was unfortunate in its influence on the minds of men who less unnaturally than unjustly were led to regard the poet also with something of the distaste so justly and generally incurred by his editor. This prepossession evidently inflamed and discoloured the opinions of the good Leigh Hunt, who probably would under no conditions have been able adequately to estimate the masculine and unfanciful genius of such writers as Ben Jonson, Massinger, and Ford; and a like influence may not impossibly have disturbed the far surer judgment and affected the far finer taste of a student so immeasurably superior to either Hunt or Beddoes in the higher and rarer faculties of critical genius as Charles Lamb. To Massinger at least, though assuredly not to Ford (who had not yet been edited by Gifford when Lamb put forth his priceless and incomparable book of 'Specimens'), the most exquisite as well as the most generous of great critics was usually somewhat less than liberal, if not somewhat less than just.

But what is most notable to me in the judgment above cited from the correspondence of Beddoes is that he should have touched on the incidental point of action which this anonymous play has in common with *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Duke of Milan*, and should also have remarked on the poetical or fanciful quality which does undoubtedly distinguish its language from the comparatively unimaginative diction of Massinger, without taking further account of the general and radical dissimilarity of workmanship which leaves the style of this poem equidistant from

the three several styles of the sober Philip, the thoughtful George, and the fiery Cyril. It is singular that the name of a fourth poet, the quality of whose peculiar style is throughout perceptible, should have been missed by so acute and well-read a student of our dramatic poetry. The style is certainly and equally unlike that of Chapman, Massinger, or Tourneur; but it is very like the style of Middleton. The combination of the plots is as pitifully incongruous and formless, the movement of the metre as naturally sweet and fluent, the pathos of the situations as occasionally vivid and impressive, the play of the fancy as generally delicate and unaffected, as in the best or the worst works of the fitful and powerful hand which gave us *The Changeling* and *The Witch*, *The Spanish Gipsy* and *Women beware Women*. Were there but one grain of external evidence, though light as that which now inclines the scale of probabilities in favour of Chapman, I should not hesitate in assigning to it the workmanship of this poem also; but as even such a grain of proof or of likelihood as this is wanting, we may remark one or two points in which a resemblance may be traced to the undoubted handiwork of Chapman; such as a certain grotesque abruptness and violence in some of the incidents; for example, the discharge of a pistol at the father of the heroine from the hand of her lover, by which that 'ancient sinner' is 'but mocked with death'; a semi-burlesque interlude in a scene of tragic interest and prelude to a speech of vivid eloquence, which may recall the sudden and random introduction of deeds of violence into the action in some of Chapman's plays, as, for instance, the two attempts at murder in *The Gentleman Usher*, where, though the plot is neither ill devised nor ill arranged, yet some excesses and singularities

in the leading incidents are at once perceptible and pardonable; and again, the manner of the ghost's reappearance at the close, where a disembodied spirit takes part in the stage business with all the coolness and deliberation of a living actor, and is apparently received among the company with little more sign of disturbance or surprise than if she were not confronted with her own dead body, can only be paralleled in Chapman's *Bussy d'Ambois* or the *Death's Jest-book* of Beddoes, in each of which a leading part is filled throughout the later scenes by a ghost who takes his full share of the action and the dialogue, and may be said to make himself generally and creditably useful, without exciting the slightest remark or perturbation among his fleshly fellows of the scene. The quaint materialism of these realistic and too solid spectres, who show no sign and no desire of dissolution by melting into air or evaporating into dew, has in it nothing of the fine imagination which raises the supernatural agencies employed by the author of *The Witch* into a middle region of malign and monstrous life as far above the common ground of mere prosaic phantoms as below the dark aerial height at which Shakespeare has clothed the forms with clouds and winged with winds the feet of the weird sisters. Nevertheless, both in *Bussy d'Ambois* and in this 'second Maiden's Tragedy' (as the Master of the Revels has somewhat inaptly labelled it), the first introduction of ghostly agency is impressive: and the scene in this latter where the sleep of the dead is first disturbed and her tomb violated by the passion of the baffled tyrant is well worthy of the praise it has received for the choice simplicity and earnest sweetness of style which yet hardly distinguish it above many other scenes and passages in this beautiful and

singular poem, the story of whose fate has proved as strange and as fantastic as the incidents of its plot.

The first of Chapman's historic tragedies was published at the age of forty-eight, and stands now sixth on the list of the plays in which he had the help of no partner. He never wrote better and he seldom wrote worse than in this only play of his writing which kept any firm and durable hold on the stage. The impression made on Dryden by its 'glaring colours' in the representation, and the indignant reaction of his judgment 'in the reading,' are probably known to more than have studied the work by the light of their own taste.

All his vituperation is well deserved by such excerpts as those which alone Sir Walter Scott was careful to select in his editorial note on this passage by way of illustration; not even the sharpest terms in the terrible and splendid arsenal of Dryden's satire can be too vivid or too vigorous in their condemnation of the damnable jargon in which the elder poet was prone to indulge his infirmity; whole sections of his poems and whole scenes of his plays are indeed but shapeless masses of bombast and bulky vacuity, with nothing better in them than most villainous 'incorrect English, and a hideous mingle of false poetry and true nonsense; or at least a scantling of wit, which lies gasping for life and groaning beneath a heap of rubbish.' The injustice of the criticism lies only in the assertion or implication that there was nothing discoverable on all Chapman's ground but such cinder-heaps and wind-bags; whereas the proportion of good to bad in this very play of *Bussy d'Ambois* is enough to outweigh even such demerits as it doubtless shares with too much of its author's work. There is a bright and fiery energy throughout, a vigour of ambitious aspiration,



which is transmitted as it were by echo and reflection from the spirit of the poet into the spirit of his hero. The brilliant swordsman of the court of Henri III., who flashes out on us as the joyous central figure of one of the most joyous and vigorous in all the bright list of those large historic groups to which the strong swift hand of Dumas gave colour and life, has undergone at the heavier hand of the old English poet a singular transformation. He is still the irresistible duellist and amorist of tradition ; but instead of the grace and courtliness proper to his age and rank, Chapman has bestowed on him the grave qualities of an epic braggart, whose tongue is at least as long as his sword, and whose gasconades have in them less of the Gascon than of our 'Homer-Lucan' himself, who with all his notable interest in the France of his time and her turbulent history had assuredly nothing of the lighter and more gracious characteristics of French genius. But in the broad full outline of this figure, and in the robust handling of the tragic action which serves for environment or for background to its haughty and dilated proportions, there is more proof of greatness than Chapman had yet given. His comic or gnomic poetry may be better or at least less faulty in its kind, but in that kind there is less room for the growth and display of those greater qualities which not infrequently struggle through the hot and turbid atmosphere of his tragic writing, and show by a stormy and cloudy illumination the higher reaches of his real genius. Nor is there in these rugged outlying highlands of tragedy, and in the somewhat thick and troubled air of the brooding skies above them, no beauty perceptible but the beauty of cloud and flame, of flood and fell : they have intervals of pure sunshine and soft greensward, interludes of

grave and tender harmony, aspects of deep and serene attraction. There is a noticeable abruptness and want of ease in the disposal of the incidents, as though the workman were not yet well broken in to his business ; and in effect Chapman never did learn to run with perfect ease and grace in tragic harness. Yet if his tragedies were erased from the roll of his works, and only the most perfect of his comedies and the better portions of his other poems were left for our judgment, the sentence that we should then have to pass would assuredly assign him a much lower place among English poets than he now may rightly claim to hold. A greater and a faultier genius finds expression in these tragic poems than in the more general and equable excellence of even his best comic or romantic plays.

The first in order of these, especially at first sight, is beyond question the most effective in point of dramatic interest. With all its tumid and turbid exuberance of speech, the action of this play never actually halts or flags. There is no depth or delicacy of character discernible in any of the leading parts ; in some cases indeed it is hard at first to determine whether the author meant to excite the sympathies or the antipathies of his audience for a good or for a bad character ; the virtue of the heroine collapses without a touch, and friends and foes change sides with no more reason shown than that the figure of the dance requires it. But the power of hand is gigantic which shifts and shuffles these puppets about the board ; there are passages of a sublime and Titanic beauty, rebellious and excessive in style as in sentiment, but full of majestic and massive harmony. The magnificent speech of the hero, stricken to death and leaning on his sword to die, has been often quoted, and as a sample of fiery imagination clothed in verse

of solemn and sonorous music it can never be overpraised ; the inevitable afterthought that the privilege of tragic poetry to exceed the range of realism is here strained to the utmost and beyond it will recur on reading many of the most memorable passages in these plays, where the epic declamation of the speaker breaks the last limit of law to attain the last limit of licence possible to a style which even in outward form keeps up any pretence of dramatic plausibility. Any child may see and object that no man ever died with such a funeral oration on his lips ; but any critic qualified to judge of such a poet in his strength and his weakness will temper the reflection with admiration of ' that full and heightened style ' which the third among English tragic poets has applauded in the tragedies of Chapman. The height indeed is somewhat giddy, and the fullness too often tends or threatens to dilate into tumidity ; sometimes the foot slips and the style stumbles heavily from its height, while for its fullness we find but the emptiness of a burst bladder ; but while the writer's head remains clear and his hand sure, the high air of this poetry is fresh and buoyant, and its full cadences have in them a large echo as of mountain winds and waters. And if Webster, with the generous justice proper to a great fellow-craftsman in the highest guild of art, was able to condone the manifest abuse in Chapman's work of rhetoric and mere poetry, those may well be content to do likewise who bear duly in mind the admirable absence of any such defect from the vivid and intense veracity of his own.

If the union of active interest with superb declamation may suffice to explain the prolonged good fortune of Chapman's first tragedy on the boards, we can discover no such pretext to account for the apparent favour shown to his next venture in the same field.

It has no passage comparable for force and vehemence of imagination to the highest moods of the author of *Bussy d'Ambois* ; to the second evocation of the spirit in a speech of which Lamb said well that it was ' tremendous, even to the curdling of the blood ; I know nothing in poetry like it ' ; nor to the dying appeal of Bussy to his own surviving fame, or the sweet and weighty verses of invocation in which his mistress adjures ' all the peaceful regents of the night ' to favour the first meeting of the lovers. It is disfigured by no such bloated bombast and animated by no such theatrical changes of effect, such sudden turns and sharp surprises, as fit the earlier play to catch the eyes and ears of an audience more impressible than critical. It has no such violent interlude of action and emotion as the scene in which Montsurry (Monsoreau) extorts by torture the confession of her guilt from the bleeding hand of his wife, an incident which singularly enough recalls a similar scene in the earliest play of the great French improvisatore who has told in such different fashion the story of the ambushade by which Bussy fell under the weight of treacherous numbers ; though Dumas, in accordance, I believe, with all tradition, assigns to the Duke of Guise the brutal act of force by which his wife was compelled to allure her lover into the snare set by her husband ; whereas the English poet has not only altered the persons of the agent and patient, but has increased the means of compulsion from a pinch on the arm to the application of the rack to a body already mangled by such various wounds that the all but unparalleled tenacity of life in the victim, who reappears in the last scene not perceptibly the worse for these connubial endearments, is not the least notable in a series of wonders among which we scarcely make account of the singular part

assigned to 'the affable familiar ghost' which moves so freely among the less incorporeal actors. To the tough nerves and vigorous appetite of the original audience this scene was no doubt one of the most acceptable in a closing act as remarkable for the stately passion of the style as for the high poetic interest of thought and action. Of these two qualities we find but one, and that the less dramatic, in the next work of the poet. No poem, I suppose, was ever cast in dramatic form which appealed so wholly to the pure intellect. The singleness of purpose and the steadiness of resolution with which the poet has pursued his point and forborne all occasions to diverge from his path to it have made his work that which it is; a sculptured type and monument of his high and austere genius in the fullness of its faculties and the ripeness of its aims. *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron, Marshal of France*, a small epic in ten books or acts, is the noblest memorial we have of its author's original powers. Considered from the point of view it requires us to assume if we would do any justice to the mind which conceived and the hand which completed such a design, it is a wholly great and harmonious work of genius. Here for once not a note is out of tune, not a touch is out of keeping; the very inflation of the style is never the inflation of vacuity; its majesty is no longer tumid, and its elevation is no longer insecure. This at least has a right to be counted for ever among the classic works of English poetry. We close the book at last with a full and satisfied sense of severe delight in the deep inner music which sounds on in the mind's ear after study of the thought and passion which inform it. The height and the harmony of this poem are equal forces in the composition of its excellence;



the height of its conception and the harmony of its completion were alike needed to do justice to such lofty thought and such profound passion as it was called upon to handle and to sound. The strength and wealth of intelligence and of language from the opening of the first act to the close of the tenth show not a sign anywhere of possible exhaustion or inadequacy to the large demands made on them by the poet's high design. But that such a poem should ever have been 'acted in two plays at the Blackfriars and other public stages' must seem to us one of the strangest records in theatrical history. Its appearance on any boards for a single night would have been remarkable enough; but its reappearance at various theatres is all but incredible. The standard of culture and the level of intelligence required in its auditors surpass what we can conceive any theatrical audience to have attained in any modern age. It is not merely that the hearer or spectator of such a poem in action would have to follow an unbroken line of high thought and lofty language without interlude or relief worth mentioning of lower or lighter material; he would have to forgo all points of interest whatever but the satisfaction of the pure intelligence. There is endless repetition with absolutely no progress; infinite effusion of speech without one break of material incident. Even the subtle action and reaction of the mind, the ebb and flow of spiritual forces, the coming and going of intellectual influences, are not here given with the strength and cunning of such a master's hand as might secure and sustain the interest of a student in tracing their various movements by the light of his guidance; those movements are too deep and delicate for the large epic touch of Chapman to pursue with any certitude. A few strong broad strokes often repeated suffice to

complete the simple and vigorous outline which is all he can give us of a character. It has been observed that the portrait of the traitor marshal 'is overlaid with so many touches that the outline is completely disguised'; but as none of these are incongruous, none mistimed or misplaced, we may reply that it is of the very essence of this character to express its passion with such effusion and exuberance of verbal energy that the very repetition and prolongation of these effects tend rather to heighten than to weaken the design, to intensify than to impair the impression of the weakness and the force of the mind that thus pours itself out and foams itself away in large and swelling words. The quality of pathos is not among the dominant notes of Chapman's genius; but there is pathos of a high and masculine order in the last appeals and struggles of the ruined spirit and the fallen pride which yet retain some trace and likeness of the hero and the patriot that has been, though these be now wellnigh erased and buried under the disgrace of deeds which have left nothing in his place but the ruins of a braggart and a traitor. Upon the two high figures of the marshal and the king Chapman has expended his utmost power; and they confront each other on his page in gigantic outline like two studies of a great sculptor whose work is never at its best but when it assumes the heroic proportion of simple and colossal forms. There is no growth or development in either character; Chapman is always least happy when he tries his prentice hand at analysis; he only does well when as here he brings before us a figure at once full-grown, and takes no care but to enforce the first impression by constant deepening of the lines first drawn, not by addition of fresh light and shade, by softening or heightening of minor tones

and effects. The high poetic austerity of this work as it now stands is all the more striking from the absence of any female element ; the queen appears in the fourth act of the second part as little more than a dumb figure ; the whole interest is political, and the whole character is masculine, of the action and the passion on which the poet has fixed our attention and concentrated his own. A passage now cancelled in which the queen and Mademoiselle de Verneuil were brought forward, and the wife gave the mistress a box on the ear, had naturally drawn down a remonstrance from the French ambassador who saw the domestic life of his master's court presented with such singular frankness of exposition to the contemporary eyes of London playgoers ; and at his instigation the play was not unreasonably prohibited, by an act of censorship assuredly not so absurd or so arbitrary as in our own day has repeatedly exposed the direction of the English stage to the contempt and compassion of civilised Europe ; which has seen at once the classical and the contemporary masterpieces of Italy and of France, and among them the works of the greatest tragic dramatist whom the world has seen since the death of Shakespeare, forbidden by the imperial mandate of some Lord Chamberlain or other Olympian person to corrupt the insular chastity of an audience too virtuous to face the contamination of such writers as Hugo or Alfieri ; while the virtue thus tenderly guarded from the very sight of a Marion or a Mirra was by way of compensation—there is a law of compensation in all things—graciously permitted by leave of official examiners and under favour of a chaste Chamberlain to gloat upon the filthiest farces that could be raked from the sweepings of a stage whose national masterpieces were excluded from our own. But it is only

proper that the public virginity which averts her eyes from the successors of Euripides or of Shakespeare should open her bosom to the successors of Wycherley and Mrs. Behn. In the time of Chapman the Master of the Revels wielded with as fitful a hand as imperious an authority as any court official of later date ; yet then also there was so curious and scandalous an alternation of laxity with rigour in the direction of stage affairs that in the teeth of a direct prohibition the players, 'when they saw that the whole court had left town, persisted in acting' the suppressed play with all the offending parts revived for the satisfaction of an audience of citizens whose uncourtly suffrage was possibly attracted by this defiance of the court ; and it may be conjectured that the savour of this political scandal gave zest and edge to their relish of the otherwise grave and sober entertainment set before them by the poet, whose somewhat weighty venture may thus have been floated into favour on the artificial tide of a chance which had made it the pretext of a popular cry. If, however, there was any such anti-Gallican or seditious element in the success of a play which must certainly, one would say, have needed all the outward and casual help it could get to impose itself on the goodwill of the multitude, the French envoy was not slack in bringing a counter-influence to bear against it ; for three of the recalcitrant actors were arrested at his suit ; but M. de Beaumont regretfully adds that 'the principal person, the author, escaped.' When three years later the poem was published, his printers had probably learnt caution enough from this fresh experience to ensure the suppression in all published copies of every trace of the forbidden part ; and indeed there should seem to be two gaps in the printed text ; one at the sudden



end of the brief fourth act of the first part, which breaks off sharply after the eloquent and elaborate narrative of the speeches exchanged on the occasion of Biron's embassy to England, between the marshal, Queen Elizabeth, and her prime minister; one at the end of the first or opening of the second act of the second part, which acts in both editions of the play are run into each other without any mark of division; but the great length of the fifth (or tenth) act as it now stands may suggest that this seeming confusion has been caused by a mere numerical derangement or misprint.

The fittest symbol I can find for this great and central work of Chapman's genius would be one derived from itself; we might liken the poem to that 'famous mountain' which was to be carved into the colossal likeness of the hero, a giant holding a city in his left hand and pouring from his right an endless flood into a raging sea. This device of a mad and magnificent vanity gives as it were a reflection of the great and singular qualities of the poem; it has an epic and Titanic enormity of imagination, the huge and naked solitude of a mountain rising from the sea, whose head is bare before the thunders, and whose sides are furrowed with stormy streams; and from all its rocks and torrents, crags and scaurs and gulleys, there seems to look forth the likeness afar off of a single face, superhuman and inordinate in the proportion of its prodigious features. The general effect is as that of some vast caprice of landscape; at once fantastic, exaggerated, and natural. Around it we may group the remaining works of its author as lower spurs of the outlying range of mountains. None of these lesser poems were ever befriended by such an occasion as lifted for a season into perilous



popularity the mightiest of their author's dramatic brood ; that the two likeliest in form and spirit to this giant brother of their race appear to have won no popular favour at all is certainly less remarkable than the record of its own success. *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* is a singular example of Chapman's passion for paradox. It is a work of mature power and serious interest, richer in passages of moral magnificence and interludes of exalted meditation than any but that greatest of his poems which we have just been considering ; from the large storehouse of these three plays a student may select at every step among their massive heaps of mental treasure fresh samples of rare thought and costly style, fresh ingots of weighty and glittering gold, fresh jewels of profound and living lustre. The third of these has less in common with the play of which it is the nominal sequel than with the two of intervening date ; it has indeed more of incident than they, but its value and interest mainly depend on its gnomic or contemplative passages. In the argument, the action, and the characters of this poem one chief aim of the author was apparently to reverse all expectations that might be excited by its title, and by way of counterpart to produce a figure in all points opposite to that of his former hero. The brother and avenger of Bussy appears as the favourite and faithful follower of a leading accomplice in his murder ; he is as sober, sententious, and slow in action as his brother was boastful, impetuous, and violent ; he turns every chance of fortune and every change of place into an occasion for philosophic debate and moral declamation ; the shelter provided by his patron and the ambushade prepared by his enemies are to him equally opportune for the delivery of a lecture on ethics, as close and serried in its array of

argument as it is grave and measured in its eloquence of exposition. Hamlet himself gave less cause of complaint to the 'poor ghost' whose second resurrection was insufficient to impel him to the discharge of his office than this yet more deliberate and meditative avenger of blood; and it is not without cause that the tardy shade of Bussy rises to rebuke the tardier hand of his brother in words heavier and more bitter than any that fall from the majesty of buried Denmark. The quaint contrast between the tragic violence of the story and the calm interest of the dialogue is not the only aspect afforded by this poem of its author's taste for extravagance of paradox and shocks of moral surprise. His delight throughout these historic plays is to put into the mouths of his chief speakers some defence of the most preposterous and untenable proposition, some apology for the most enormous and unpopular crime that his ingenuity can fix upon for explanation or excuse. Into the mouth of Biron he had already put a panegyric on the policy and the person of Philip II.; into the mouth of Clermont he puts a vindication of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. This latter curious and courageous abuse of intellectual dexterity may perhaps have contributed to the ill success of a play which in any case must have disappointed, and that apparently by design and of malice prepense, the expectations appealed to by a title seemingly devised to trade upon the popularity of *Bussy d'Ambois*, and make its profit out of the artificial capital of a past success. The audience attracted by the promise implied in such a title may easily have been disinclined by such a disappointment to receive with toleration these freaks of dialectic ingenuity. It is not likely that a writer who must have been old enough at the age of thirteen to feel and

to remember the shock of the first tidings of the hideous twenty-fourth of August 1572—that an English poet and patriot of the stalwart type which from all that we know of Chapman we might expect to find always as nobly exemplified in his life and writings as in those of such elder and younger contemporaries as Spenser and Jonson—should have indulged any more personal sentiment in these eccentric trials of intellectual strength than a wayward pleasure in the exercise and exhibition of his powers of argument and eloquence; but there was certainly in his nature something of the sophist as well as of the gnomic poet, of Thrasymachus as well of as Theognis. He seems to feel a gladiator's pleasure in the sword-play of a boisterous and high-handed sophistry less designed to mislead or convince than to baffle or bear down his opponent. We can imagine him setting up almost any debatable theorem as a subject for dispute in the schools of rhetoric, and maintaining his most indefensible position with as much energy and cunning of argument as his native force of mind could bring to the support of his acquired skill of fence: we can perceive that in any such case he would argue his point and reinforce his reasoning with no less passion and profusion of thought and speech than if his heart and conscience were enlisted on the side which in fact he had taken up by mere chance or defiant caprice. This, however, is by no means the general character of the philosophy set forth and the eloquence displayed in this poem. The whole character of Clermont, conceived as it is in a spirit of direct defiance to all rules and traditions of dramatic effect, and elaborated as though in disdain of possible success or the anticipated chance of popularity, shows once more the masterly workmanship of a potent and resolute hand.

In almost every scene there are examples of sound and noble thought clothed in the sober colours of terse and masculine poetry ; of deep and high meditation touched now and then with the ardour of a fervid spirit and the light of a subtle fancy. At every page some passage of severe beauty reminds us with how great a spirit we are called to commune, and stand in the presence of how proud and profound a mind. His equal love for the depths and the heights of speculation may too often impel this poet to overstrain his powers of thought and utterance in the strong effort to dive or to soar into an atmosphere too thin or a sea too stormy to admit the facile and natural play of his vigorous faculties ; but when these are displayed in their full strength and clearness the study of them gives us some taste of the rare and haughty pleasure that their owner must have taken in their exercise. Here as elsewhere I had taken note in my mind of special verses and passages fit for extraction, which might give some sample of the general power and charm of the keen intellect and the fine imagination that shape and inform the scheme and action of the poem ; but to cite one or more instances of these would be to wrong the profuse and liberal genius which has sown them broadcast in so rich a soil. The reader who seeks them for himself with a judging eye and an apprehensive spirit will not be unlikely to make of *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, for the wealth and the weight of its treasures of ethical beauty, his chosen and peculiar favourite among the works of Chapman.

In the last of this stately line of tragic poems dealing with the recent or immediate history of France we find the same prevailing qualities of moral force and poetic dignity. The tragedy of *Chabot* is more equable

and less ambitious in treatment than any of its contemporaries ; but the model given in its hero of majestic faith and august integrity may be classed among the purest and most perfect studies that we have from the sculptor's hand. The serene and stainless figure of a wholly righteous and loyal man is so thoroughly and truthfully sustained by the high instinct and spiritual sense of the poet that we may trace and recognise from the first a nature so inflexible at once and so sensitive as to refuse all shelter or compromise which might rather protect than vindicate his innocence from the attacks of fraud and injustice, and when cleared of all their charges and restored to all his honours to lie down and die of the wound inflicted by the mere shame of suspicion : a heart so stout and so tender that it could resist all shocks and strokes of power or treachery, and bleed to death for grief to be distrusted where most of all it had deserved to find trust. But here again the singleness and purity of the interest could hardly be expected to secure success on the stage ; and though we have no hint as to the good or ill fortune of this high-toned poem, we may conjecture that it could hardly have been redeemed from popular indifference by the dramatic power and pathetic impression of the scene in which the wife and father-in-law of the arraigned admiral prevail by the justice and dignity of their appeal upon the pride and prepossession of the queen. Yet this at least, and the last scene in which Chabot dies at the feet of his repentant master with a prayer for the pardon of his enemy on the lips that kiss for the last time the hand which must confer it, should have found favour with an audience capable of doing justice to the high desert of such austere and unseductive excellence.



As we have no external ground for conjecture by what original impulse or bias of mind the genius of Chapman was attracted to the study and representation on an English stage of subjects derived from the annals of contemporary France, or what freak of perverse and erratic instinct may have led him to bring before a Protestant audience the leading criminals of the Catholic party under any but an unfavourable aspect, so we have no means of guessing whether or not any conscious reason or principle induced him to present in much the same light three princes of such diverse characters as the first Francis and the third and fourth Henries of France. Indeed, but for a single reference to his ransom 'from Pavian thraldom' (Act ii. Scene 3), we should be wholly at a loss to recognise in the royal master of Chabot the radiant and exuberant lover of the whole world of women,

ce roi sacré chevalier par Bayard,  
Jeune homme auquel il faut des plaisirs de vieillard,

who in our own age has been far otherwise presented on the theatre of a far mightier poet. There is no hint in the play that any more prevailing and less legitimate influence than a wife's was brought to bear in favour of Chabot on a king with whom his lawful consort might have been supposed of all women the least likely to prevail; and by this suppression or disguise of the personal interest actually exerted on behalf of his hero the dramatist has defrauded of her due credit the real friend of the fallen admiral; for it was not at the instance of the queen, but at the instance of Madame d'Etampes, a kinswoman of Chabot, that the chancellor Poyet was arrested and disgraced in the same year (1542) which had seen the

fall, the restoration, and the death by heart-break of the faithful minister who owed not to the intercession of the king's wife but to his own alliance by blood with the king's mistress that revenge which at the first occasion given the duchess was not slow to exact from her lover on the triumphant enemy of her kinsman. The haughty integrity which involved and upheld Chabot in danger and disgrace, and the susceptible pride which when restored to favour could no longer support him under the sense of past degradation, are painted from the life of history; but his poet may be thought to have somewhat softened the harsher features of that arrogance and roughness of temper which impaired the high qualities and imperilled the high station of the brave and upright admiral who dared his king to find a ground for his impeachment. And if we miss in Chapman's portrait those chivalrous and amorous features which long kept fresh in popular fancy the knightly fame of Francis I., the figure set before us is not wanting in a kingly grace and dignity which the dramatist has chosen to bestow with an equal hand on the grandson to whom neither history nor tradition has assigned even so much of 'the king-becoming graces' as may be allowed to the conqueror of Marignano. Chapman indeed has in this case taken so little care to preserve the historic relations of his leading characters that the king by whose intervention Bussy d'Amboise was betrayed to the jealousy of Monsoreau appears not as the treacherous enemy but as the trusty friend and patron of his brother's rebellious favourite; pardons and prefers him to the rank of his own, and adopts him into that station by the surname of his eagle; while instead of the king it is here the Duke of Anjou who delivers his refractory minion into the murderous

snare set for him by an injured husband. But if I read aright the hinted imputation of Brantôme, it would seem that some years before he put into the hands of Monsoreau the intercepted correspondence of Bussy with his wife the king had already laid an ambush of 'twelve good men' armed with pistols, and 'mounted on Spanish horses taken from the stables of a very great personage who had set them on,' to attempt the life of his brother's indomitable champion, who was preserved as well by his own presence of mind and discretion as by the good fortune which befell him to find the door of a neighbour's house ajar for him to slip through and fasten it against pursuit. Being compelled after this adventure to leave Paris in consequence of his threats 'to slit folk's nostrils, and that he would kill everybody' in retaliation for this nocturnal assault, the gallant bravo was escorted out of the city by all the noble retainers of his ignoble patron the Duke of Anjou, but by three gentlemen only of the king's household brigade, his kinsman Brantôme, whom he charged at parting to bear back his defiance to the whole court, M. de Neuville, and the hero Crillon, who in spite of his attachment to the king's party refused to forsake the friendship of so stout a swordsman. Although the first standard edition of Brantôme's *Lives* was not published by a descendant of his family till thirty-two years after the death of Chapman, it is singular that the English poet who thought fit to choose as a subject for tragedy the fate of a man at the time of whose murder he had himself reached the age of twenty should also have thought fit so seriously to alter the facts of his story for no discernible reason but a desire to shift the charge of the principal villainy from the shoulders of a king to those of his brother. In either

play dedicated to the memory of Bussy—who at the wildest pitch of his windy and boisterous vanity can never have anticipated that twenty-eight years after his death he would figure on the page of a foreign poet as a hero of the Homeric or Lucanian type—the youngest son of Catharine de' Medici is drawn in colours as hateful as those of truth or tradition; whereas the last king of his line is handled with such remarkable forbearance that his most notorious qualities are even less recognisable than those of his grandfather in the delicate and dignified study of Chapman. A reader indeed, if such a one were possible, who should come to the perusal of these plays with no previous knowledge of French history, would find little difference or distinction between Henri de Valois and Henri de Bourbon; and would probably carry away the somewhat inaccurate impression that the slayer of the Duke of Guise and the judge of the Duke of Biron were men of similar tastes and manners, respectable if not venerable for their private virtues, elegant and sententious in their habitual choice of language, grave and decorous in their habitual carriage and discourse, and equally imbued with a fine and severe sense of responsibility for the conscientious discharge of the highest and hardest duties of their royal office. It is less remarkable, as the dramatist in his dedication to Sir Thomas Howard disclaims all pretension to observe 'the authentical truth of either person or action,' as a thing not to be expected 'in a poem whose subject is not truth, but things like truth,' that he should have provided to avenge the daring and turbulent desperado who outbraved the gorgeous minions of the king with a simple dress set off by the splendour of six pages in cloth of gold, and then signalised by a fresh insult under the very eyes of

Henri his enforced reconciliation with the luckless leader of their crew, a brother of whose name I know nothing but that Georges de Clermont d'Amboise, not a follower of Guise but a leader of the Huguenots, was slain seven years earlier than Bussy in the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Chapman's apology for the attribution of this name to the apparently imaginary avenger of his brother's blood is better worth remembering than such inquiries are worth pursuing. 'Poor envious souls they are,' says the poet, 'that cavil at truth's want in these natural fictions'; a reasonable and memorable protest against the perverse or senseless paradox which confounds truth with fact and refuses to distinguish veracity from reality; and which would not be worth the passing notice of a contemptuous instant if men of genius would forbear to confuse the minds of their feeble and more servile admirers by the adoption and promulgation in the loudest tones of prophecy of such blatant and vacuous babble about 'kinship of fiction to lying' and so forth as should properly be left to the lips of the dunces who may naturally believe it, being thick-witted enough to accept as serious reasoning and deliberate opinion the most wilful and preposterous paradoxes thundered forth from pulpit or from tripod in the most riotous and ludicrous paroxysms of wayward humour or fantastic passion.

That the 'Roman tragedy' of *Cæsar and Pompey* was earlier in date than most though later in publication than any except *Chabot* of the French series, we might have conjectured without the evidence of the dedication. It is more unequal and irregular in the proportion of its good parts and its bad than any of Chapman's tragedies except *Bussy d'Ambois*; I should imagine it to be a work of nearly the same



period ; though, as was before intimated, it bears more affinity to the sequel of that play and to the great tragic poem on Biron in the main quality of interest and the preponderance of speech over action. To this play we might adapt a well-known critical remark of Dr. Johnson's on *Henry VIII.*, much less applicable in that case than in this, and say that the genius of the author comes in and goes out with Cato. Not that even in this case that rhetorical phrase would be wholly accurate ; there are noble lines and passages discernible elsewhere ; but the glory of the poem is given it by the scenes in which Cato is the leading figure. I know nothing in moral or contemplative poetry more admirable than the speech in the first scene on fear or mistrust of the gods, and the soliloquy in the last act on sleep and death. The serene and sublime emotion of heroic wisdom is in either passage so touched and tempered with something of the personal ardour of a noble passion that its tone and effect are not merely abstract or didactic but thoroughly dramatic and human, and the weighty words ring in the ear of our remembrance long after the mind has first unconsciously absorbed and retained the lofty sound and sense of the memorable and magnificent verse. It is especially in such examples as these that we perceive the great quality of Chapman's genius, the true height and purity of its power ; majestic intellect lighted and enkindled by poetic imagination, the high beauty of heroic thought warmed and winged with the spiritual fire of a living sentiment. It is true that those who read only the glorious excerpts given from this poem by Charles Lamb will have a nobler impression of its merit than they who read the whole ; but those only who read the whole will know all its merit as well as all its demerit ; they will find

fresh treasures of fine thought and high expression embedded among dense layers of crabbed and confused rhetoric, wedged in between rocky strata of thick and turgid verse. As there is little other life or movement in the play but that of declamation or discussion, we might presume that if it had ever 'touched at the stage' its reception would in all likelihood have been something less than favourable; but we have already remarked on such inexplicable variations of good and ill luck in the fortunes of Chapman's plays that no conclusion of the kind can be assumed as certain. That it never did lose on any boards its long-preserved immunity from the touch of actors or managers, we may, I suppose, after the author's assurance of its virginity at the date of publication, be tolerably confident.

Twenty years after the death of Chapman the long list of his dramatic works was completed by the publication of two tragedies in which, though there are but few qualities common to both, there are yet fewer traces of either the chief merits or the chief defects which distinguish and deform alike the poems and the tragic plays published during the life of the author. There is nothing in them of bombast, of barbarism, or of obscurity; there is assuredly no lack of incidents, and these, however crowded and violent in themselves, are conducted with such clearness and simplicity of exposition as to keep the attention and interest of the reader undistracted and unfatigued. The style in both is pure, lucid, and vigorous; equally sustained at an even height above the lowlands of prosaic realism and beneath the cloudland of winds and vapours; more forcible and direct in the first play, more florid and decorative in the second. On the other hand, these posthumous children have not

the lofty stature, the kingly aspect, the gigantic sinews and the shining eyes which went far to redeem the halting gait and the irregular features of their elders. They want the breadth of brow, the weight of brain, the fullness of speech, and the fire of spirit which make amends for the harsh voice and stammering tongue that imperfectly deliver the message entrusted to them; the tumultuous eloquence which bears down and sweeps away all physical impediment of utterance, the fervid vitality which transfigures and atones for all clumsiness of gesture or deformity of limb.

No thought so ripe and sweet, no emotion so exalted and august, is here discernible as that which uplifts the contemplation and upholds the confidence of the highest in spirit and the deepest in thought among those earlier speakers who served as mouthpieces of the special genius of their high-minded and deep-souled creator. There is no trace of the ethical power which informs and moulds the meditation of Clermont or of Cato, no relic of the imaginative passion which expands and inflates the fancy of Bussy or of Biron. In *Alphonsus* there is more of Chapman's quality at first perceptible than in *Revenge for Honour*; there is a certain hardness in the simplicity of tone, a certain rigidity in the sharp masculine lineaments of style and character, common to much of his work when free from the taint of crabbed or bombastic obscurity. The singular violation and confusion of history, which may be taken to mask the probable allusions to matters of more recent political interest, are ably explained and illustrated by Dr. Elze in the thoroughly efficient and sufficient introduction to his edition of this play; in which the student will observe, with gratitude for his help and admiration for his learning in all matters of social and historical

illustration, that the German editor has kept well to such work as he was perfectly competent to discharge, and has never on this occasion exchanged the highest seat in the hall of scholarship for the lowest form in the school of criticism. By him as by others the actual merit of this most unhistoric of historical dramas has perhaps been somewhat underrated. Naked as it is of ornament, violent in most of its action and repulsive in several of its scenes, barren of beauty in language and poor in treasure of thought, it never fails in animation and interest; and the hardened student of our early stage who has once entered the shambles will hardly turn away in disgust or weariness from the fume and flow of monotonous bloodshed till his curiosity at least has been satisfied by the final evolution of the tangled web of slaughter. In this catastrophe especially there is a remarkable sense of strong material effect, with a notable capacity for vigorous theatrical manipulation of incident, which is as notably deficient in the earlier and loftier works of Chapman.

In the tragedy of *Revenge for Honour* I have already noticed the curious change of style which distinguishes it from all other works of Chapman: a change from rigidity to relaxation, from energy to fluency, from concentration to effusion of language. It has something of the manner and metre of Fletcher and his school, something of the softness and facility which lend a half-effeminate grace to the best scenes of *Shirley*: while in the fifth act at least I observe something too much of the merely conventional imagery and the overflow of easy verbosity which are the besetting sins of that poet's style. Only in one image can I find anything of that quaint fondness for remote and eccentric illustration in which the verse of Chapman

resembles the prose of Fuller : this is put into the mouth of the villain of the piece, who repudiates conscience as

a weak and fond remembrance  
Which men should shun, as elephants clear springs,  
Lest they behold their own deformities  
And start at their grim shadows.

Even here the fall of the verse is not that of Chapman, and the tone of the verses which immediately follow is so utterly alien from the prevailing tone of his that the authenticity of the scene, as indeed of the whole play, can only be vindicated by a supposition that in his last years he may for once have taken the whim and had the power to change his style and turn his hand to the new fashion of the youngest writers then prospering on the stage. Only the silliest and shallowest of pedants and of sciolists can imagine that a question as to the date or the authorship of any poem can be determined by mere considerations of measure and mechanical computation of numbers ; as though the language of a poem were divisible from the thought or (to borrow a phrase from the Miltonic theology) the effluence were separable from the essence of a man's genius. It should be superfluous and impertinent to explain that the expression is not to be considered apart from the substance ; but while men who do not know this are suffered to utter as with the authority of a pedagogue or a pulpiteer the verdict of the gerundgrinders and metremonsters on the finest and most intricate questions of the subtlest and most sublime of arts, it is but too evident that the explanation of even so simple and radical a truth can be neither impertinent nor superfluous. It is not because a particular pronoun or conjunction is used in this play some fifty times oftener than it occurs in any



other work of its author, a point on which I profess myself neither competent nor careful to pronounce, that I am prepared to decide on the question of its authenticity or its age. That question indeed I am diffident enough to regard as one impossible to resolve. That it is the work of Chapman I see no definite reason to disbelieve, and not a little reason to suppose that it may be. The selection and treatment of the subject recall the trick of his fancy and the habit of his hand ; the process of the story is in parts quaint and bloody, galvanic and abrupt ; but the movement on the whole is certainly smoother, the evolution more regular, the arrangement more dramatic than of old. Accepting it as the last tragic effort of the author whose first extant attempt in that line was *Bussy d'Ambois*, we shall find perhaps in the general workmanship almost as much of likeness as of unlikeness. Considered apart and judged by its own merits, we shall certainly find it, like *Alphonsus*, animated and amusing, noticeable for a close and clear sequence of varying incident and interest, and for a quick light touch in the sketching of superficial character. These being its chief qualities, we may fairly pronounce that whether or not it be the work of Chapman it belongs less to his school than to the school of Shirley ; yet being as it is altogether too robust and masculine for a work of the latter school, it seems most reasonable to admit it as the child of an older father, the last-born of a more vigorous generation, with less of strength and sap than its brothers, but with something in return of the younger and lighter graces of its fellows in age. The hero and his father are figures well invented and well sustained ; the villains are not distorted or overdrawn, and the action is full of change and vivacity.

Of the poems published by Chapman after the first of his plays was given to the press, we may say generally that they show some signs of advance and none of retrogression from the standard of his earlier work. Out of many lovely lines embedded in much thick and turbid matter I choose one couplet from *The Tears of Peace* as an example of their best beauties :—

Free sufferance for the truth makes sorrow sing,  
And mourning far more sweet than banqueting.

In this poem, with much wearisome confusion and iteration of thought and imagery, reprobation and complaint, there are several noble interludes of gnomic and symbolic verse. The allegory is of course clouded and confounded by all manner of perversities and obscurities worth no man's while to elucidate or to rectify ; the verse hoarse and stiff, the style dense and convulsive, inaccurate and violent ; yet ever and anon the sense becomes clear, the style pure, the imagery luminous and tender, the verse gracious and majestic ; transformed for a moment and redeemed by great brief touches of high and profound harmony ; of which better mood let us take in proof a single instance, and that the most sustained and exquisite we shall find :—

Before her flew Affliction, girt in storms,  
Gash'd all with gushing wounds, and all the forms  
Of bane and misery frowning in her face ;  
Whom Tyranny and Injustice had in chase ;  
Grim Persecution, Poverty, and Shame ;  
Detraction, Envy, foul Mishap and lame  
Scruple of conscience ; Fear, Deceit, Despair ;  
Slander and Clamour, that rent all the air ;  
Hate, War, and Massacre ; uncrowned Toil  
And Sickness, t' all the rest the base and foil,  
Crept after ; and his deadly weight trod down  
Wealth, Beauty, and the glory of a crown.

These usher'd her far off ; as figures given  
 To show, these crosses borne make peace with heaven.  
 But now, made free from them, next her before,  
 Peaceful and young, Herculean silence bore  
 His craggy club ; which up aloft he hild ;  
 With which and his fore-finger's charm he still'd  
 All sounds in air ; and left so free mine ears,  
 That I might hear the music of the spheres,  
 And all the angels singing out of heaven ;  
 Whose tunes were solemn, as to passion given ;  
 For now, that Justice was the happiness there  
 For all the wrongs to Right inflicted here.  
 Such was the passion that Peace now put on ;  
 And on all went ; when suddenly was gone  
 All light of heaven before us ; from a wood,  
 Whose sight foreseen now lost, amazed we stood,  
 The sun still gracing us ; when now, the air  
 Inflamed with meteors, we discover'd fair  
 The skipping goat ; the horse's flaming mane ;  
 Bearded and trained comets ; stars in wane ;  
 The burning sword ; the firebrand-flying snake ;  
 The lance ; the torch ; the licking fire ; the drake ;  
 And all else meteors that did ill abode  
 The thunder chid ; the lightning leapt abroad ;  
 And yet when Peace came in all heaven was clear ;  
 And then did all the horrid wood appear,  
 Where mortal dangers more than leaves did grow ;  
 In which we could not one free step bestow,  
 For treading on some murder'd passenger  
 Who thither was by witchcraft forced to err :  
 Whose face the bird hid that loves humans best,  
 That hath the bugle eyes and rosy breast,  
 And is the yellow autumn's nightingale.

This is Chapman at his best ; and few then can  
 better him. The language hardly holds lovelier lines,  
 of more perfect colour and more happy cadence, than  
 some few of these which I have given to show how  
 this poet could speak when for a change he was con-  
 tent to empty his mouth of pebbles and clear his  
 forehead of fog. The vision of Home which serves

as overture to this poem is not the only other noble feature which relieves a landscape in too great part made up of rocks and brambles, of mire and morass ; and for the sake of these hidden green places and sunny moments some yet may care to risk an hour or so of toil along the muddy and thorny lanes that run between.

From the opening verses of *The Tears of Peace* we get one of the few glimpses allowed us into the poet's personal life, his birthplace, the manner and the spirit of his work, and his hopes in his 'retired age' for 'heaven's blessing in a free and harmless life'; the passage has beauty as well as interest far beyond those too frequent utterances of querulous anger at the neglect and poverty to which he could not resign himself without resentment. It would have been well for himself as for us, who cannot now read such reiterated complaints without a sense of weariness and irritation, if he had really laid once for all to heart the noble verses in which he supposes himself to be admonished by the 'spirit Elysian' of his divine patron Homer, who told him, as he says, 'that he was angel to me, star, and fate.'

Thou must not undervalue what thou hast,  
In weighing it with that which more is graced ;  
The word that weigheth inward should not long  
For outward prices. This should make thee strong  
In thy close value ; Nought so good can be  
As that which lasts good between God and thee.  
Remember thine own verse—Should Heaven turn Hell  
For deeds well done, I would do ever well.

The dignity and serenity of spirit here inculcated are not compatible with the tone of fierce remonstrance and repining defiance which alternates with such higher tones of meditation and self-reliance as constantly exalt and dignify the praises of those patrons to whom

he appeals for recognition as for a right not to be withheld without discredit to them and danger of future loss of that glory which he had to give. In all dedicatory verse known to me I find nothing that resembles the high self-respect and haughty gratitude of a poet who never forgets that for every benefit of patronage conferred he gives fully as much as he may receive. Men usually hurry over the dedications of poet to patron with a keen angry sense of shame and sorrow, of pity and repulsion and regret ; but it may be justly claimed for Chapman that his verses of dedication can give no reader such pain as those of others. His first and best patron in the court of James was that youth on whose coffin so many crowns of mourning verse were showered, and who does by all report seem to have well deserved that other than official regrets should go with him to his grave. A boy dying at eighteen after three years' proof of interest in the higher culture of his time, three years during which he had shown himself as far as we can see sincere and ardent in his love of noble things only, and only of noble men, of poetry and of heroes—champion of Raleigh in his prison and patron of Chapman in his need—must certainly have been one worthy of notice in higher places than a court ; one who, even if born in a loftier atmosphere and likelier to bring forth seed of enduring honour, would assuredly have earned remark and remembrance as a most exceptional figure, of truly rare and admirable promise. The inscription of Chapman's *Iliad* to Prince Henry is one of his highest and purest examples of moral verse : the august praise and grave exaltation of his own great art give dignity to the words of admonition as much as of appeal with which he commends it to the acceptance and reverence of kings.



We may well believe that the prince's death gave to the high heart of his old Homeric teacher and counsellor of royal and heroic things a sharper pain than the mere sense of a patron lost and of personal as well as of national hopes cut off. Yet in his special case there was good reason for special regret. The latter instalments of his lofty labour on the translation of Homer were inscribed to the ignoblest among the minions, as the former had been inscribed to the noblest among the children of the king. An austere and stately moralist like Chapman could hardly have sought a stranger patron than Carr; and when we find him officiating as paranymp at those nuptials which recall the darkest and foulest history in all the annals of that reign, the poisonous and adulterous secrets of blood and shame in whose darkness nothing is discernible but the two masked and muffled figures of treachery and murder, we cannot but remember and apply the parallel drawn by Macaulay from the court of Nero; nor can it be with simple surprise that we listen to the sermon or the song composed by Seneca or by Lucan for the epithalamium of Sporus and Locusta.

The celebration of that monstrous marriage in ethic and allegoric verse brought nothing to Chapman but disquiet and discredit. Neither Andromeda Lady Essex nor Perseus Earl of Somerset had reason to thank or to reward the solitary singer whose voice was raised to call down blessings on the bridal bed which gave such a Julia to the arms of such a Manlius. The enormous absurdity of Chapman's ever unfortunate allegory was on this auspicious occasion so much more than absurd that Carr himself would seem to have taken such offence as his luckless panegyrist had undoubtedly no suspicion that he might give. And yet this innocence of intention affords one of

the oddest instances on record of the marvellous want of common sense and common tact which has sometimes been so notable in men of genius. It is hardly credible that a grave poetic moralist of fifty-five should have written without afterthought this thrice unhappy poem of *Andromeda Liberata*. Its appearance did for once succeed in attracting attention; but the comment it drew down was of such a nature as at once to elicit from the author 'a free and offenceless justification of a lately published and most maliciously misinterpreted poem'; a defence almost as amazing as the offence, and decidedly more amusing.

The poet could never imagine till now so far-fetched a thought in malice ('such was my simplicity,' he adds with some reason) as would induce any reader to regard as otherwise than 'harmlessly and gracefully applicable to the occasion'—these are his actual words—the representation of 'an innocent and spotless virgin [*sic*] rescued from the polluted throat of a monster, which I in this place applied to the savage multitude.' Such is the perversity of man, that on perusing this most apt and judicious allegory 'the base, ignoble, barbarous, giddy multitude' of readers actually thought fit to inquire from what 'barren rock' the new Perseus might be said to have unbound his fettered virgin; and in answer to this not unnatural inquiry Chapman had the audacious innocence to affirm—and I doubt not in all truth and simplicity—that the inevitable application of this happy and appropriate symbol had never so much as crossed his innocent mind. As if, he exclaims indignantly, the word 'barren' could be applied to a man!—was it ever said a man was barren? or was the burden of bearing fruit ever laid on man? Whether this

vindication was likely under the circumstances to mend matters much 'the prejudicate and peremptory reader' will judge for himself. One rumour, however, the poet repudiates in passing with some violence of language; to the effect, we may gather, that he had been waylaid and assaulted as was Dryden by Rochester's ruffians, but at whose instigation we can only conjecture. He will omit, he says, 'as struck dumb with the disdain of it, their most unmanly lie both of my baffling and wounding, saying "Take this for your Andromeda"; not being so much as touched, I witness God, nor one syllable suffering.'

The rumour is singular enough, and it would be curious to know if at least any such threat or attempt were actually made. From Carr at all events we can hardly believe that it would have come; for it must be set down to his credit that in the days of obscurity which followed on his disgrace and retirement he seems to have befriended the poet whose humbler chances of court favour had presumably fallen with his own. It was unlikely that any man ever so slightly associated with the recollection of a matter which the king was probably of all men least desirous to keep in mind should again be summoned by two of the Inns of Court, as Chapman had been summoned the year before, to compose the marriage masque for a royal wedding. More inauspicious by far though far more innocent than those of Somerset were the nuptials he had then been chosen to celebrate; the nuptials of Elizabeth, called the Queen of Hearts, with Frederick, one day to be surnamed the Winter-King. For that fatal marriage-feast of 'Goody Palsgrave' and her hapless bridegroom he had been bidden to provide due decorations of pageantry and verse; and had produced at least some bright graceful couplets

and stanzas, among others hardly so definable. But to such a task he was now not likely to be called again ; the turning-point of his fortunes as far as they hung upon the chance of patronage at court was the wedding-day of Carr. As a favourite of the dead prince to whom his Homer had been inscribed in weighty and worthy verses, he may have been thought fit the year before to assist as the laureate of a day at the marriage which had been postponed by the death of the bride's brother in the preceding autumn ; and some remembrance of the favour shown him by the noble youth for whom the country if not the court had good reason to mourn may have kept his name for a while before the eyes of the better part of the courtiers, if a better part there were : but if ever, as we may conjecture, his fortune had passed through its hour of rise and its day of progress, we must infer that its decline was sudden and its fall irremediable.

In the same year which witnessed the unlucky venture of his *Andromeda* Chapman put forth a poem on the death of Lord Russell of Thornhaugh, a patron, it should seem, of a far other kind than Carr ; distinguished as a soldier in the field now only memorable to us for the death of Sir Philip Sidney, where if report may be trusted his romantic or Homeric valour was worthy to have employed the pen of a translator of the Iliad ; and yet more remarkable for the comparative justice and mercy displayed in his military administration of Ireland. This epicede, longer and more ornate than that issued two years before on Prince Henry, is neither much worse nor much better in substance and in style. Each may boast of some fine and vigorous verses, and both are notable as examples of the poet's somewhat troubled and confused elevation of thought and language. In *Eugenia*

especially the same high note of moral passion alternates with the same sharp tone of contemptuous complaint that we find in *The Tears of Peace* and in the very last verses affixed by way of epilogue to his translation of the Hymns and other Homeric fragments. This bitterness of insinuation or invective against meaner scholars or artists we should set down rather to a genuine hatred of bad work, a genuine abhorrence of base ambition and false pretence, than to any unjust or malevolent instinct of mere jealousy ; which yet might perhaps be found pardonable to the neglected and laborious old age of a high-minded artist and hard-working scholar such as Chapman. There are impressive touches of a higher mood in the funeral hymn which completes the somewhat voluminous tribute of ceremonial verse offered up at the grave of Lord Russell ; but the greater part of the poem is more noticeable for quaintness than for any better quality, being indeed eccentric in execution as in conception beyond the wont even of Chapman. It carries, however, some weight of thought, and contains probably the longest and minutest catalogue ever given in verse of the signs of an approaching storm ; a description which shows at once the close and intense observation of nature, the keen and forcible power of reproduction, and the utter incompetence to select and arrange his material, alike and at all times distinctive of this poet.

Four years after the miscarriage of *Andromeda* we find his translation of Hesiod ushered in by a dignified appeal and compliment to ' the truly Greek inspiration and absolutely Attic elocution ' of no less a patron than Bacon ; ' whose all-acknowledged faculty hath banished flattery therein even from the court ; much more from my country and more than upland simplicity.' But



for his *Odyssey* and *Hymns* of Homer, as well as for his plea addressed to the country on behalf of the beleaguered handful of troops serving with Sir Horace Vere, he sought or found no patronage but that of Carr ; and that this should not have failed him gives evidence of some not ignoble quality in one whom we are accustomed only to regard as the unloveliest of the Ganymedes whose Jupiter was James. In the dedication of the *Hymns* he refers to the retired life of his disgraced patron in a tone which might not unworthily have saluted the more honourable seclusion of a better man. To these as to others of Chapman's moral verses Coleridge has paid a tribute of thoughtful and memorable praise, deserved no less by the fragments of ethical poetry printed some years earlier with a metrical version, after that of Petrarca, of the penitential Psalms. Among these there are many grains of genuine thought, of terse and grave expression, worth remark and remembrance. So much indeed may be said in parting of Chapman's poetry as a whole ; in all his poems of dedication or mere compliment, as in the elaborate and eloquent rhapsody prefixed to Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*, we shall find some weight of reflection and some energy of utterance : in the commendatory verses to Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* we shall find something better ; four of the loveliest lines in the language, perfect for melody, purity, and simple sweetness of colour.

It is better to think of Chapman as the just and generous friend of other and younger men's genius than to remark except in passing on his quarrel in old age with Jonson, of which we know nothing but by an unhappy fragment of virulent and worthless verse, transcribed it should seem during his last illness by some foolish and officious friend or flatterer (as

we may conceive) of the old man's petulances and infirmities. For these there is reason to fear that we may have to make more allowance than must under all circumstances be claimed by age and sickness, even where adversity has no share in the sufferings of the last years of a laborious and noble life. After the fall of Chapman's fortunes, if as I have conjectured we may suppose them to have risen for a while under the patronage of Prince Henry and collapsed with the favour of Carr, he lived for twenty years without further success on the stage to which he had given so much of the best labour and the best faculty of his mind: and we may doubt whether the friends or patrons of his old age were numerous or generous enough to secure these latter years against neglect and obscurity. One comfort, however, must have been with him to the last, whether or not we agree with Gifford in accepting the apparent evidence for the poverty and solitude in which he died; the comfort of great work done, the recollection of high hopes attained, the evidence of daring dreams made real and fruitful of fame not yet to be. Some ten years before his death the poet of sixty-five could look on his completed version of all the Homeric poems, and say:—

The work that I was born to do is done.

It was a great work, and one wrought in a great spirit; and if, as he says of Homer, not without evident and immediate reference to his own lot, 'like a man *verecundi ingenii* (which he witnesseth of himself), he lived unhonoured and needy till his death,' we may believe that he did not live dissatisfied or dejected. Unworthy indeed would the workman have been of his own work if from the contemplation of it he had

been too poor in spirit or too covetous of reward to draw the consolation of a high content. This strong and sovereign solace against all the evils that can beset the failing age and fallen fortunes of a brave man he surely deserved, if ever man deserved, to have and to retain. His work was done ; neither time nor trouble could affect that ; neither age nor misfortune could undo it. He had lived long and worked hard, and the end of all the valiant labour and strenuous endurance that must have gone to the performance of his task had not been less than triumphant. He had added a monument to the temple which contains the glories of his native language, the godlike images and the costly relics of its past ; he had built himself a massive and majestic memorial, where for all the flaws and roughness of the weather-beaten work the great workmen of days unborn would gather to give honour to his name. He had kindled a fire which the changing winds of time were not to put out, the veering breath of taste and opinion was never to blow upon so hard but that some would return to warm themselves at its heat and to cheer themselves with its light. He showed what he could of Homer to the lifted eyes of Keats, and the strong and fiery reflection was to the greater poet as very dawn itself, the perfect splendour of Hellenic sunrise. Much of precious and undying praise has been worthily bestowed on it ; but while anything of English poetry shall endure the sonnet of Keats will be the final word of comment, the final note of verdict on Chapman's Homer.

This of course was the sovereign labour of his life ; and to this the highest of his other works can only be considered as bringing some addition of honour. That there is yet in these enough to serve as the

foundation of a lasting fame I have made it the purpose of my present task to show. But his name will always first recall neither the plays nor the poems which might well have sufficed for the work and the witness of a briefer or less fruitful life; the great enterprise of which the firstfruits were given to the world in his fortieth year and the last harvest was garnered in his sixty-sixth must be the first and last claim of his memory on the reverence of all students who shall ever devote the best of their time and of their thought to loving research or to thankful labour in the full field of English poetry. The indomitable force and fire of Chapman's genius have given such breath and spirit to his Homeric poems that whatever their faults and flaws may be they are at least not those of other men's versions; they have a seed and salt of personal life which divide them from the class of translated works and remove them (it might wellnigh be said) into the rank of original poems. By the standard of original work they may be more fairly and more worthily judged than by the standard of pure translation: and upon their worth as tested by that standard the judgment of Coleridge and of Lamb has been passed once for all, without fear of appeal or danger of reversal while the language in which the poems were written and the judgment given shall endure. To all lovers of high poetry the great old version of our Homer-Lucan must be dear for its own sake and for that of the men who have loved and held it in honour; to those who can be content with fire for light and force for harmony it must give pleasure inconceivable by such as cannot but remember and repine for the lack of that sweet and equal exaltation of style which no English poet of his age, and Chapman less than any, could hope even faintly to reproduce

or to recall. In his original poems the most turgid and barbarous writer of a time whose poets had almost every other merit in a higher degree than those Grecian gifts of perfect form, of perfect light, and of perfect measure, which are the marks of the Homeric poems no less than of the Sophoclean drama, he could not so put off his native sin of forced and inflated obscurity as to copy in the hot high colours of a somewhat strained and tattered canvas more than the outlines of the divine figures which his strong hand and earnest eye were bent to bring before his readers' sight. It is much that his ardour and vigour, his energy and devotion, should have done the noble and memorable work they have. That 'unconquerable quaintness' which Lamb was the first to point out as the one perpetual note of infirmity and imperfection in the great work of Chapman is more hopelessly alien from the quality of the original than any other defect but that of absolute weakness or sterility of spirit could be. Altering the verdict of Bentley on Pope, we may say that instead of a very pretty it is a very noble poem, but it must not be called Homer. Quaintness and he, to steal a phrase from Juliet, are many miles asunder.

The temperament of Chapman had more in it of an Icelandic than a Hellenic poet's ; and had Homer been no more than the mightiest of skalds or the Iliad than the greatest of sagas, Chapman would have been fitter to play the part of their herald or interpreter. His fiery and turbid style has in it the action rather of earthquakes and volcanoes than of the oceanic verse it labours to represent ; it can give us but the pace of a giant for echo of the footfall of a god ; it can show but the huge movements of the heaving earth, inflated and inflamed with unequal and violent life, for the innumerable unity and harmony, the radiant



and buoyant music of luminous motion, the simplicity and equality of passion and of power, the majestic monochord of single sound underlying as it were at the heart of Homeric verse the multitudinous measures of the epic sea.

The name of Chapman should always be held great ; yet must it always at first recall the names of greater men. For one who thinks of him as the author of his best play or his loftiest lines of gnomic verse a score will at once remember him as the translator of Homer or the continuator of Marlowe. The most daring enterprise of a life which was full of daring aspiration and arduous labour was this of resuming and completing the 'mighty line' of *Hero and Leander*. For that poem stands out alone amid all the wide and wild poetic wealth of its teeming and turbulent age, as might a small shrine of Parian sculpture amid the rank splendour of a tropic jungle. But no metaphor can aptly express the rapture of relief with which you come upon it amid the poems of Chapman, and drink once more with your whole heart of that well of sweet water after the long draughts you have taken from such brackish and turbid springs as gush up among the sands and thickets of his verse. Faultless indeed this lovely fragment is not ; it also bears traces of the Elizabethan barbarism, as though the great queen's ruff and farthingale had been clapped about the neck and waist of the Medicean Venus ; but for all the strange costume we can see that the limbs are perfect still. The name of Marlowe's poem has been often coupled with that of the 'first heir' of Shakespeare's 'invention' ; but with all reverence to the highest name in letters be it said, the comparison is hardly less absurd than a comparison of *Tamburlaine* with *Othello*. With all its

overcrowding beauties of detail, Shakespeare's first poem is on the whole a model of what a young man of genius should not write on such a subject; Marlowe's is a model of what he should. Scarcely the art of Titian at its highest, and surely not the art of Shakespeare at its dawn, could have made acceptable such an inversion of natural rule as is involved in the attempted violation by a passionate woman of a passionless boy; the part of a Joseph, as no less a moralist than Henri Beyle has observed in his great work on *Love*, has always a suspicion about it of something ridiculous and offensive; but only the wretchedest of artists could wholly fail to give charm to the picture of such a nuptial night as that of Hero and Leander. The style of Shakespeare's first essay is, to speak frankly, for the most part no less vicious than the matter: it is burdened and bedizened with all the heavy and fantastic jewellery of Gongora and Marini; it is written throughout in the style which an Italian scholar knows as that of the *seicentisti*, and which the duncery of New Grub Street in its immeasurable ignorance would probably designate as 'Della-Cruscan'; nay, there are yet, I believe, in that quarter rhymesters and libellers to be found who imagine such men as Guido Cavalcanti and Dante Alighieri to have been representative members of the famous and farinaceous academy. Not one of the faults chargeable on Shakespeare's beautiful but faultful poem can justly be charged on the only not faultless poem of Marlowe. The absence of all cumbrous jewels and ponderous embroideries from the sweet and limpid loveliness of its style is not more noticeable than the absence of such other and possibly such graver flaws as deform and diminish the undeniable charms of *Venus and Adonis*.

With leave or without leave of a much-lauded critic who could see nothing in the glorified version or expansion by Marlowe of the little poem of Musæus but 'a paraphrase, in every sense of the epithet, of the most licentious kind,' I must avow that I want and am well content to want the sense, whatever it be, which would enable me to discern more offence in that lovely picture of the union of two lovers in body as in soul than I can discern in the parting of Romeo and Juliet. And if it be always a pleasure to read a page of Marlowe, to read it after a page of Chapman is to the capable student of high verse 'a pleasure worthy Xerxes the great king.' Yet there is not a little to be advanced in favour of Chapman's audacious and arduous undertaking. The poet was not alive, among all the mighty men then living, who could worthily have completed the divine fragment of Marlowe. As well might we look now to find a sculptor who could worthily restore for us the arms of the Venus of Melos—'Our Lady of Beauty,' as Heine said when lying at her feet stricken to death, 'who has no hands, and cannot help us.' For of narrative poets there were none in that generation of any note but Drayton and Daniel; and though these might have more of Marlowe's limpid sweetness and purity of style, they lacked the force and weight of Chapman. Nor is the continuation by any means altogether such as we might have expected it to be—a sequel by Marsyas to the song of Apollo. Thanks, as we may suppose, to the high ambition of the poet's aim, there are more beauties and fewer deformities than I have found in any of his other poems. There are passages indeed which at first sight may almost seem to support the otherwise unsupported tradition that a brief further fragment of verse from the hand of

Marlowe was left for Chapman to work up into his sequel. This for instance, though somewhat over-fantastic, has in it a sweet and genuine note of fancy :—

Her fresh-heat blood cast figures in her eyes,  
And she supposed she saw in Neptune's skies  
How her star wander'd, wash'd in smarting brine,  
For her love's sake, that with immortal wine  
Should be embathed, and swim in more heart's-ease  
Than there was water in the Sestian seas.

Here again is a beautiful example of the short sweet interludes which relieve the general style of Chapman's narrative or reflective verse :—

For as proportion, white and crimson, meet  
In beauty's mixture, all right clear and sweet,  
The eye responsible, the golden hair,  
And none is held without the other fair ;  
All spring together, all together fade ;  
Such intermix'd affections should invade  
Two perfect lovers.

And this couplet has an exquisite touch of fanciful colour :—

As two clear tapers mix in one their light,  
So did the lily and the hand their white.

That at least might have been written by Marlowe himself. But the poem is largely deformed by excrescences and aberrations, by misplaced morals and mistimed conceits ; and at the catastrophe, perhaps half consciously oppressed and overcome by the sense that now indeed he must put forth all his power to utter something not unworthy of what the ' dead shepherd ' himself might have spoken over the two dead lovers, he puts forth all his powers for evil and for error, and gives such a narrative of their end as might have sufficed to raise from his grave the avenging

ghost of the outraged poet who has been supposed—but unless it was said in some riotous humour of jesting irony, the supposition seems to me incredible—to have commended to Chapman, in case of his death, the task thus ill discharged of completing this deathless and half-accomplished work of a genius ‘that perished in its pride.’

The faults and weaknesses of strong men seem usually an integral part of the character or the genius we admire for its strength; and the faults ingrained in the work of Chapman were probably indivisible from the powers which gave that work its worth. Those blemishes not less than those beauties of which the student is at almost every other step compelled perforce to take note seem inevitable by a poet’s mind of his peculiar bent and bias. There are superfluities which we would fain see removed, deformities which we would fain see straightened, in all but the greatest among poets or men; and these are doubtless in effect irremovable and incurable. Even the Atlantean shoulders of Jonson, fit to bear the weight of mightiest monarchies, have been hardly tasked to support and transmit to our own day the fame of his great genius, overburdened as it was with the twofold load of his theories on art and his pedantries of practice. And Chapman, though also a brother of the giant brood, had not the Herculean sinews of his younger friend and fellow-student. That weight which could but bend the back that carried the vast world of invention whose twin hemispheres are *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* was wellnigh enough to crush the staggering strength of the lesser Titan. His style reels and struggles under the pressure; he snorts and heaves as Typhœus beneath Etna, sending up at each huge turn and convulsion of his uneasy bulk some shower



of blinding sparkles or volume of stifling vapour. But for all the discords and contortions of his utterance the presence is always perceptible of a giant, and of one issued from the lineage of the early gods.

He alone, as far as I can see, among all the great men of his great age, had anything in common with Jonson for good or evil. It would not be accurate to lay the heaviest faults of either poet to the account of his learning. A weight of learning at least equal to that which bowed and deformed the genius of Jonson and of Chapman served but to give new shape and splendour to the genius of Milton and of Landor. To these it was but as a staff to guide and a crown to glorify their labours; a lantern by whose light they might walk, a well-spring from whose water they might draw draughts of fresh strength and rest. But by this light the two elder poets too often failed to walk straight and sure, drank too often from this fountain a heady or a narcotic draught. One at least, and not he who had drunk deepest of the divine and dangerous spring, seems at times under its influence to move and speak as under some Circean transformation. The learning of Jonson, doubtless far wider and sounder than that of Chapman, never allowed or allured him to exchange for a turbid and tortuous jargon the vigorous purity of his own English spirit and style. Nevertheless, of these four illustrious men whom I suppose to have been the most deeply read in classical literature, with the exception probably of Gray and possibly of Coleridge, among all our poets of the past, the two great republicans as surely were not as the two distinguished royalists surely were pedants: and Chapman, being the lesser scholar, was naturally the greater pedant of the pair.

As a dramatic poet he has assuredly never yet

received his due meed of discerning praise ; but assuredly no man of genius ever did so much, as though by perverse and prepense design, to insure a continuance of neglect and injustice. Had he allied himself with some enemy in a league against his own fame—had he backed himself against success for a wager, let his deserts be what they might—he could have done no more than he has done to make certain of the desired failure. With a fair share of comic spirit and invention, remarkable at least in a poet of such a grave and ambitious turn of genius, he has spiced and larded his very comedies with the thick insipid sauce of pedantic declamation. Their savourless interludes of false and forced humour may indeed be matched even in the greatest of Jonson's works ; there is here hardly anything heavier than the voluminous foolery of *Scoto* of Mantua and the dolorous long-winded doggerel drivelled forth by that dreary trinity of dwarf, eunuch, and hermaphrodite, whom any patron of less patience than *Volpone*, with a tithe of his wit and genius, would surely have scourged out of doors long before they were turned forth to play by *Mosca*. But when on a fresh reading we skip over these blocks laid as if on purpose in our way through so magnificent a gallery of comic and poetic inventions, the monument of a mind so mighty, the palace of so gigantic a genius as Ben Jonson's, we are more than content to forget such passing and perishable impediments to our admiration of that sovereign intellect which has transported us across them into the royal presence of its ruling and informing power.

The 'shaping spirit of imagination' proper to all great men, and varying in each case from all other, reforms of itself its own misshapen work, treads down and triumphs over its own faults and errors, renews

its faltering forces and resumes its undiminished reign. But he who in so high a matter as the dramatic art can sin so heavily, and so triumphantly tread under the penalty of his transgression, must be great among the greatest of his fellows. Such, with all his excesses and shortcomings in the way of dramatic work, was Jonson; such certainly was not Chapman. The tragedy, for example, of *Chabot*, a noble and dignified poem in the main, and the otherwise lively and interesting comedy of *Monsieur d'Olive*, are seriously impaired by a worse than Jonsonian excess in the analysis and anatomy of 'humours.' The turncoat advocate and the mock ambassador bestride the action of the plays and oppress the attention of the reader with a more 'importunate and heavy load' than that of Sinbad's old man of the sea. Another point of resemblance to Jonson on the wrong side is the absence or insignificance of feminine interest throughout his works. No poet ever showed less love or regard for women, less care to study or less power to paint them. With the exception of a couple of passages in his two best comedies, the wide field of Chapman's writings will be found wellnigh barren of any tender or noble trace of passion or emotion kindled between man and woman.

These two passages stand out in beautiful and brilliant contrast to the general tone of the poet's mood; the praise of love has seldom been uttered with loftier and sweeter eloquence than in the well-known verses<sup>1</sup> which celebrate it as 'nature's second sun,' informing and educing the latent virtues in man 'as the sun doth colours'; the structure and cadence of the verse, the choice and fullness of the words, are alike memorable for the perfect power and purity, the strong simplicity and luminous completeness of

<sup>1</sup> *All Fools*, Act i. Scene i.

workmanship which may be (too rarely) found and enjoyed in the poetry of Chapman. The passage in *The Gentleman Usher* (Act iv. Scene 3), which sets forth the excellence of perfect marriage, has less of poetic illustration and imaginative colour, but is a no less admirable model of clear and vigorous language applied to the fit and full expression of high thought and noble emotion. But as a rule we find the genius of Chapman at its best when furthest removed from female influence; as in the two plays of Biron and those nobler parts of the 'Roman tragedy' of *Cæsar and Pompey* in which Cato discourses on life and death. The two leading heroines of his tragic drama, Tamyra and Caropia, are but a slippery couple of sententious harlots, who deliver themselves in eloquent and sometimes in exalted verse to such amorous or vindictive purpose as the action of the play may suggest. Whether the secret of this singular defect in a dramatic poet were to be sought in coldness of personal temperament, in narrowness of intellectual interest, or simply in the accidental circumstances which may have given a casual direction to his life and thought, we need not now think to conjecture. He was ready enough to read lectures on love or lust, to expatiate with a dry scholastic sensuality on the details and influences of form and colour, to apply the terms and subtleties of metaphysical definition to the physical anatomy of beauty; indeed, one at least of his poems may be described as a study in philosophic vivisection applied by a lover to his mistress, in which analysis and synthesis of material and spiritual qualities in action and reaction of cause and effect meet and confound each other—to say nothing of the reader. But of pure passion and instinctive simplicity of desire or delight there is little

more trace than of higher emotion or deeper knowledge of such things as belong alike to mind and body, and hold equally of the spirit and the flesh.

Here again we find that Jonson and Chapman stand far apart from their fellow-men of genius. The most ambitious and the most laborious poets of their day, conscious of high aims and large capacities, they would be content with no crown that might be shared by others ; they had each his own severe and haughty scheme of study and invention, and sought for no excellence which lay beyond or outside it ; that any could lie above, past the reach of their strong arms and skilful hands, past the scope of their keen and studious eyes, they would probably have been unable to believe or to conceive. And yet there were whole regions of high poetic air, whole worlds of human passion and divine imagination, which might be seen by humbler eyes than theirs and trodden by feebler feet, where their robust lungs were powerless to breathe, and their strenuous song fell silent. Not greater spirits alone, such as Marlowe's and Shakespeare's, but such lesser spirits as Dekker's had the secret of ways unknown to them in the world of poetry, the key of chambers from which they were shut out. In Marlowe the passion of ideal love for the ultimate idea of beauty in art or nature found its perfect and supreme expression, faultless and unforced. The radiant ardour of his desire, the light and the flame of his aspiration, diffused and shed through all the forms of his thought and all the colours of his verse, gave them such shapeliness and strength of life as is given to the spirits of the greatest poets alone.

He, far rather than Chaucer or Spenser, whose laurels were first fed by the dews and sunbeams of Italy and France, whose songs were full of sweet



tradition from oversea, of memories and notes which 'came mended from their tongues'—he alone was the true Apollo of our dawn, the bright and morning star of the full midsummer day of English poetry at its highest. Chaucer, Wyatt, and Spenser had left our language as melodious, as fluent, as flexible to all purposes of narrative or lyrical poetry as it could be made by the grace of genius; the supreme note of its possible music was reserved for another to strike. Of English blank verse, one of the few highest forms of verbal harmony or poetic expression, the genius of Marlowe was the absolute and divine creator. By mere dint of original and godlike instinct he discovered and called it into life; and at his untimely and unhappy death, more lamentable to us all than any other on record except Shelley's, he left the marvellous instrument of his invention so nearly perfect that Shakespeare first and afterwards Milton came to learn of him before they could vary or improve on it. In the changes rung by them on the keys first tuned by Marlowe we trace a remembrance of the touches of his hand; in his own cadences we catch not a note of any other man's. This poet, a poor scholar of humblest parentage, lived to perfect the exquisite metre invented for narrative by Chaucer, giving it (to my ear at least) more of weight and depth, of force and fullness, than its founder had to give; he invented the highest and hardest form of English verse, the only instrument since found possible for our tragic or epic poetry; he created the modern tragic drama; and at the age of thirty he went

Where Orpheus and where Homer are.

Surely there are not more than two or three names in any literature which can be set above the poet's

of whom this is the least that can in simple truth be said. There is no record extant of his living likeness ; if his country should ever bear men worthy to raise a statue or a monument to his memory, he should stand before them with the head and eyes of an Apollo looking homeward from earth into the sun : a face and figure, in the poet's own great phrase,

Like his desire, lift upward and divine.

To all things alike we find applied in turn this fervour of ideal passion ; to the beauty of women, to the hunger after sway, to the thirst after knowledge, to the energy of friendship or ambition, to the energy of avarice or revenge. Sorrow and triumph and rapture and despair find in his poetry their most single and intense expression, extreme but not excessive ; the pleasures and the pains of each passion are clothed with the splendour and harmony of pure conceptions fitted with perfect words.

There is the same simple and naked power of abstract outline in every stroke of every study which remains to us from his hand ; in the strenuous greed and fantastic hate of Barabas, in the hysteric ardours and piteous agonies of Edward, in the illimitable appetite of Tamburlaine for material rule and of Faustus for spiritual empire, and in the highest and haughtiest aspirations of either towards that ultimate goal of possession where he may lay hands on power unattainable and touch lips with beauty inexpressible by man, we trace the same ideal quality of passion. In the most glorious verses ever fashioned by a poet to express with subtle and final truth the supreme aim and the supreme limit of his art, the glory and the joy of his labour, the satisfaction and the insufficiency of its triumph in the partial and finite expression of

an infinite delight and an indefinite desire, Marlowe has summed up all that can be said or thought on the office and the object, the means and the end of this highest form of spiritual ambition, which for him was as it were shadowed forth in all symbols and reflected in all shapes of human energy, in all exaltations of the spirit, in all aspirations of the will. Being a poet of the first order, he was content to know and to accept the knowledge that ideal beauty lies beyond the most beautiful forms and ideal perfection beyond the most perfect words that art can imbue with life or inflame with colour ; an excellence that expression can never realise, that possession can never destroy.

The nearer such an artist's work comes to this abstract perfection of absolute beauty, the more clearly will he see and the more gladly will he admit that it never can come so near as to close with it and find, as in things of meaner life, a conclusion set in the act of fruition to the sense of enjoyment, a goal fixed at a point attainable where the delight of spiritual desire may be consummated, and consumed in the moment of its consummation. A man of the second order of genius is of his nature less quick to apprehend the truth that

If all the pens that ever poets held  
Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,

and if one single and supreme poem could embody in distilled expression the spirit and the sense of

every sweetness that inspired their hearts,  
Their minds, and muses on admired themes,

there would remain behind all things attainable and expressible in sound or form or colour something that will not be expressed or attained, nor pass into

the likeness of any perishable life ; but though all were done that all poets could do,

Yet should there hover in their restless heads  
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,  
Which into words no virtue can digest.

No poet ever came nearer than Marlowe to the expression of this inexpressible beauty, to the incarnation in actual form of ideal perfection, to the embodiment in mortal music of immortal harmony ; and he it is who has left on record and on evidence to all time the truth that no poet can ever come nearer. The lesser artist, with less liberty of action, will be the likelier of the two to show less loyalty of submission to the eternal laws of thought which find their full and natural expression in the eternal canons of art. In him we shall find that intellectual energy has taken what it can of the place and done what it can of the work proper to ideal passion. This substitution of an intellectual for an ideal end, of energetic mental action for passionate spiritual emotion as the means towards that end, is as good a test as may be taken of the difference in kind rather than in degree between the first and the second order of imaginative artists. By the change of instrument alone a critic of the higher class may at once verify the change of object. In almost every page of Chapman's noblest work we discern the struggle and the toil of a powerful mind convulsed and distended as by throes of travail in the effort to achieve something that lies beyond the proper aim and the possible scope of that form of art within which it has set itself to work. The hard effort of a strong will, the conscious purpose of an earnest ambition, the laborious obedience to a resolute design is as perceptible in Jonson and Chapman as

in Shakespeare and in Marlowe is the instinct of spiritual harmony, the loyalty and the liberty of impulse and of work. The lesser poets are poets prepense ; the greater are at once poets of their own making and of nature's, equidistant in their line of life from the mere singing-bird and the mere student.

Of the first order we may be sure that in any age or country the men that compose it must have been what they were, great as poets or artists, lyric or dramatic ; of the second order we may well believe that in a different time or place the names which we find written in its catalogue might have been distinguished by other trophies than such as they now recall. And this, which may seem to imply a superiority of intellectual power, does actually imply the reverse. Those are not the greatest among men of whom we can reasonably conceive that circumstance might have made them as great in some different way from that in which they walked ; those are not the highest poets or soldiers or statesmen whom it is possible or permissible to imagine as winning equal fame in some other field than their own, by the application to some other end of such energy and genius as made them great in the line which they were impelled to select at least as much by pressure of accident as by force of instinct, by the external necessity of chance as by the internal necessity of nature. Accident and occasion may be strongest with men of the second order ; but with minds of the first rank that which we call the impulse of nature is yet more strong than they. I doubt not that Jonson might in another age have sought and won distinction from the active life of soldiership or of statecraft ; I take leave to doubt whether Shakespeare, had he sought it, would have won.



I am not disinclined to admit the supposition that Chapman might have applied his power of moral thought and his interest in historic action to other ends than they ever served in literature or in life. But neither for his sake nor for ours am I disposed to regret that circumstance or destiny should have impelled or induced him to take instead that way of work which has given his memory a right to live with that of men who could never have taken another way than they took ; which has made it honourable and venerable to all who have any reverence for English poetry or regard for English fame ; which has set him for ever in the highest place among the servants and interpreters of Homer, and allowed us to inscribe in our imagination, as on the pedestal of a statue reared in thought to the father of our tragic verse, the name of George Chapman not too discreditably far beneath the name of Christopher Marlowe.

## APPENDIX

The following list of passages extracted from Chapman's poems by the editor of the Elizabethan anthology published in 1600 under the name of *England's Parnassus ; or, The Choicest Flowers of our Modern Poets*, was drawn up from my own copy of the original edition before I was aware that a similar list had been compiled by Mr. J. P. Collier to accompany and illustrate a private reprint of the book. From this source I learn that one extract given at p. 312 as from Chapman is in fact taken from the *Albion's England* of Warner ; as indeed, though acquainted only with fragmentary excerpts from that poem, I had already conjectured that it must be. This is preceded by another extract signed with the name of Chapman, which according to Mr. Collier is discoverable in *Ovid's Banquet of Sense* ; but after a second and third search through

every turn and recess of that dense and torrid jungle of bad and good verses I have failed to light on this particular weed or flower. Five other extracts have baffled alike my own researches and the far more capable inquisition of even Mr. Collier's learning; nor have they proved traceable by the energy and enthusiasm of Chapman's latest editor, who has properly included them in his text as authentic fragments of unknown poems by the writer to whom four of them have been assigned by Robert Allot, the editor of *England's Parnassus*. The second of these five passages he ascribes to Spenser; Spenser's it undoubtedly is not; and as it is followed by an excerpt from Chapman's *Hero and Leander*, which is likewise bestowed on Spenser by the too hasty liberality of the old editor, we have some additional reason to rely on the unmistakable evidence of the style, which bears immediate witness to the peculiar handiwork of Chapman. The last excerpt but one seems familiar to me, and is rather in the manner of Greene or Peele and their fellows than of Chapman or any later poet; I cannot but think that a student more deeply read than I in the poems interspersed among the romances of Greene and Lodge might be able to trace both the two last passages of the five here fathered on Chapman to the hand of one or the other. They have the fluency or fluidity rather of the blank verse written by the smaller scholastic poets whom we may see grouped about the feet of Marlowe; the same facile profusion and effusion of classic imagery, the same equable elegance and graceful tenuity of style, crossed here and there by lines of really high and tender beauty. It may be thought that in that case they would have been as speedily and as surely tracked by Mr. Collier as were the verses transferred from Warner to Chapman; but the most learned and acute among scholars cannot always remember the right place for all things on which his eye must have lit in the course of a lifelong study; and I find in Mr. Collier's list two passages, one given at p. 22 of *England's Parnassus* under the heading 'Bliss,' the other at p. 108 under the heading 'Gifts,' marked as of unknown origin, of which the first occurs in the fifth sestiad of Chapman's *Hero and Leander*, the second

in his *Shadow of Night*. These in the list that follows are assigned to their proper places. The number of the page referred to on the left is that in *England's Parnassus*; the number on the right refers to the page in which the same passage appears in the first edition of Chapman's collected poems.

*List of Passages extracted from Chapman's Poems in 'England's Parnassus; or, The Choicest Flowers of our Modern Poets.' 1600.*

PAGE		PAGE
3.	The golden chain of Homer's high device . . .	6
9.	Things senseless live by art, and rational die . . .	77
12.	Sacred Beauty is the fruit of sight . . .	29
15.	All excellence of shape is made for sight . . .	33
	(In the next line E. P. reads : 'To be a beetle else were no defame.')	
16.	Rich Beauty, that each lover labours for . . .	30, 31
„	O Beauty, still thy empire swims in blood . . .	31
17.	<sup>1</sup> Beauty enchasing love, love gaining beauty . . .	29
„	This Beauty fair <sup>2</sup> is an enchantment made . . .	29
19.	Beauty (in) heaven and earth this grace doth win . . .	76
20.	O Beauty, how attractive is thy power ! . . .	31
21.	So respected	
	Was Bashfulness in Athens . . . . .	86
„	Preferment seldom graceth Bashfulness . . . . .	83

<sup>1</sup> E.P. has three misprints in this extract; 'gaining' for 'gracing,' 'conflict' for 'constant,' 'time content' for 'true content'; but in a later extract at p. 38 it gives the right reading, and cites the two first lines of the stanza following, which with the third and fourth are here omitted. It attempts, however, to correct two seeming errors in the fifth and sixth: reading 'is' for 'in' and 'thrones' for 'thorns'; but in the first instance the text will be found right if the punctuation be corrected by striking out the period at the end of the line preceding; and 'thorns' may be taken to mean the harsh doctrines of the stoics subsequently referred to. In the ninth line of this unlucky stanza E.P. misprints 'grave' for 'graven.'

<sup>2</sup> So E.P. for 'beauty's fair'; and in v. 5 reads 'fault' for 'fate,' and in v. 8 'god self-love' for 'good self-love.'

# GEORGE CHAPMAN

247

PAGE		PAGE
22.	Hard it is	
	To imitate a false and forged bliss . . . . .	82
„	Bliss not in height doth dwell . . . . .	90
38.	All wealth and wisdom rests in true content <sup>1</sup> .	29
40.	Action is fiery valour's sovereign good . . . . .	85
47.	Round-headed Custom th' apoplexy is <sup>2</sup>	74
56.	In things without us no delight is sure . . . . .	76
67.	Fierce lightning from her eyes . . . . .	80
68.	Begin where lightness will, in shame it ends . . . . .	80
108.	Good gifts are often given to men past good . . . . .	13
110.	King Amalthea was transformed by Jove . . . . .	5
120.	Good deeds in case that they be evil placed <sup>3</sup> . . . . .	?
141.	Many use temples to set godly faces . . . . .	?
161.	The <sup>4</sup> noblest born dame should industrious be . . . . .	86
164.	Inchastity is ever prostitute . . . . .	15
170.	They double life that dead things' grief sustain . . . . .	77
172.	Love is a golden bubble, full of dreams . . . . .	74
174.	Love is a wanton famine, rich in food . . . . .	35
178.	Love laws and judges hath in fee . . . . .	49
180.	Love paints his longings in sweet virgins' eyes . . . . .	87
181.	Trifling attempts no serious acts advance . . . . .	77
183.	Pure love, said she, the purest grace pursues . . . . .	34
196.	What doth make man without the parts of men . . . . .	5
197.	Like as rude painters that contend to show . . . . .	6
198.	Hymen that now is god of nuptial rights <sup>5</sup> . . . . .	82
„	Before them on an altar be presented . . . . .	86

<sup>1</sup> In this extract E.P. corrects 'Bend in our circle' to 'Bound'; a reading which seems to me preferable.

<sup>2</sup> This is the reading in E.P. of the line

But custom, that the apoplexy is ;

the two following lines are transcribed exactly as they stand in the third sestiad of *Hero and Leander*.

<sup>3</sup> This extract runs thus in E.P. :

Good deeds, in case that they be evil placed,  
Ill deeds are reckonèd, and soon disgraced.  
That is a good deed that prevents a bad.

The third line occurs in the third sestiad of *Hero and Leander* (p. 76).

<sup>4</sup> So E.P. for 'And.'

<sup>5</sup> So E.P. for 'rites.'

# 248 CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

PAGE		PAGE
198.	In Athens <sup>1</sup>	
	The custom was that every maid did wear . . .	86
208.	The mind hath in itself <sup>2</sup> a deity . . .	15
„	That mind most is beautiful and high . . .	16
221.	We must in matters moral quite reject . . .	32
230.	Too much desire to please pleasure divorces . . .	28
260.	Like <sup>3</sup> as a glass is an inanimate eye . . .	74
271.	None is so poor of sense and eyne	
	To whom a soldier doth not shine . . .	45
„	No elegancie <sup>4</sup> can beautify . . .	44
273.	Every good motion that the soul awakes . . .	?
274.	As Phœbus throws	
	His beams abroad though he in clouds be closed . . .	74
	(These two are attributed to Spenser in E.P.)	
285.	Time's golden thigh	
	Upholds the flowery body of the earth . . .	72
292.	Virtue makes honour, as the soul doth sense . . .	32
„	Joy graven in sense like snow in water wastes . . .	72
295.	Good vows are never broken with good deeds . . .	76
„	We know not how to vow till love unblind us . . .	76
297.	Use makes things nothing huge, and huge things	
	nothing . . .	32
303.	Wisdom and the sight of heavenly things	
	Shines not so clear as earthly vanities	
	( <i>Blind Beggar of Alexandria</i> , vol. i. p. 2.)	
305.	Best loves are lost for wit, when men blame fortune . . .	32
308.	Words well placed move things were never	
	thought . . .	32
312.	Their virtues mount like billows to the skies . . .	?
„	Women were made for this intent, to put us into pain	
	(Warner's <i>Albion's England</i> .)	
314.	Women never	
	Love beauty in their sex, but envy ever . . .	83

<sup>1</sup> These two words are interpolated by the editor of E.P.

<sup>2</sup> So E.P. for 'herself.'

<sup>3</sup> So E.P. for 'For'; and in the next verse 'outwardly' for 'inwardly.'

<sup>4</sup> So E.P. for 'elegance.'



# GEORGE CHAPMAN

249

PAGE		PAGE
314.	Women are most won when men merit least <sup>1</sup>	83
321.	Nothing doth the world so full of <sup>2</sup> mischief fill	82
324.	The gentle humorous night	
	Implies <sup>3</sup> her middle course, and the sharp east	?
355.	With a brace of silver hinds	9
356.	Nature's bright eyesight, and the world's fair soul	10
357.	Amongst this gamesome crew is seen	48
366.	In flowery season of the year	43
	(With twolines prefixed at bottom of preceding page— The tenth of March when Aries received Dan Phœbus' rays into his horned head.)	
372.	Day's king, God of undaunted verse	81
379.	All suddenly a light of twenty hues	72, 73
395.	She lay, and seemed a flood of diamant	29, 30
	(Omitting ' Now Ovid's muse—to make me better.')	
399.	Their soft young cheek-balls to the eye	47
407.	To make the wondrous power of love appear	36
409.	Then <sup>4</sup> cast she off her robe and stood upright	23
	„ Herewith she rose, like the autumnal star	31
417.	See where she issues in her beauty's pomp	?
	„ Her hair was loose, and 'bout her shoulders hung	?
422.	Like <sup>5</sup> as a taper burning in the dark	31
	„ Now as when heaven is muffled with the vapours	33
424.	As when Jove at once from east to <sup>6</sup> west	33
464.	As she was looking in a glass	32
	(Her glass in the text.)	

<sup>1</sup> In the third line of this extract E.P. reads ' Love's *proper* lesson ' instead of ' *special*.'

<sup>2</sup> So E.P. The right reading of this beautiful couplet is :—

Ah, nothing doth the world with mischief fill,  
But want of feeling one another's ill.

*Hero and Leander*, 5th sestiad.

(E.P. prints ' will ' for ' ill.')

<sup>3</sup> This word alone would suffice to vindicate the authenticity of the fragment. It recurs perpetually in the poems of Chapman, who always uses it in the same peculiar and licentious manner.

<sup>4</sup> In the third line of this stanza *England's Parnassus* reads ' her night ' for ' the night ' ; in the eighth ' choisefull ' for ' charming ' ; in the ninth ' varnishing ' for ' vanishing.'

<sup>5</sup> So E.P. for ' And.'

<sup>6</sup> So E.P. for ' and.'

PAGE		PAGE
469.	In little time these ladies found . . . . .	47
481.	(Misprinted 465). In that mead-proud-making grass . . . . .	41, 42
485.	A soft enflowered bank embraced the fount . . . . .	23
488.	Grim Melampus with the Ethiop's feet . . . . .	13

There are thus in this anthology no less than eighty-one extracts ascribed to Chapman, besides two of which one is known and the other suspected to be the work of his hand; these are wrongly assigned to Spenser. At the time of this publication Chapman was in his forty-second year; he had published but two plays and three volumes of verse, the third being his continuation of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. Of the eighty-three passages numbered above, thirty-two are taken from this poem, twenty-five from *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, ten from *The Shadow of Night*, eight from *The Contention of Phillis and Flora*, a quaint and sometimes a graceful version into the Elizabethan dialect of a Latin or more probably a quasi-Latin poem ascribed by Ritson to one of the most famous among mediæval masters; one is taken from the first scene of his first play, one is spurious, and six (including the passage wrongly referred in a former list to *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*), whether spurious or genuine, have yet to be traced to their true source. In his critical memoir of Marlowe (*Works*, vol. i. p. lvii, ed. 1850), Mr. Dyce observes that 'the editor of *England's Parnassus* appears never to have resorted to manuscript sources'; and if, as is of course most probable, the supposition of that great scholar and careful critic be well founded, we must conclude that these passages, as well as the more precious and exquisite fragment of a greater poet which called forth this remark from his editor, were extracted by Allot from some printed book or books long lost to human sight. One small but noticeable extract of two lines and a half descriptive of midnight is evidently, I think, from a lost play. The taste of the worthy person who compiled this first English anthology was remarkable apparently for its equal relish of good verse and bad; but we may be grateful that it was by no means confined to the more popular and

dominant authors of his age, such as Spenser and Sidney ; since his faculty of miscellaneous admiration has been the means of preserving many curious fragments of fine or quaint verse, and occasionally a jewel of such price as the fragment of Marlowe which alike for tone of verse and tune of thought so vividly recalls Shelley's poem, *The Question*, written in the same metre and spirit, that one is tempted to dream that some particles of the 'predestined plot of dust and soul' which had once gone to make up the elder must have been used again in the composition of the younger poet, who in fiery freedom of thought and speech was like no other of our greatest men but Marlowe, and in that as in his choice of tragic motive was so singularly like this one.

## PHILIP MASSINGER

It is no less singular than certain that the fame of no English poet can ever have passed through more alternate variations of notice and neglect than that of the most temperate, studious, and conscientious of the successors of Shakespeare. In his own day Massinger would seem to have received, if not such honours as English lovers of dramatic poetry might think due to him in such days as ours, yet undoubtedly very much more recognition than was accorded to poets of far purer and more potent inspiration. Ford, as a master of perverse or noble passion, of stately style and severe fervour in presentation or suggestion of condensed and subdued tragedy, stands far above him: Tourneur stands higher than Ford; and Webster, if compared to them, is as Shakespeare if compared with Webster. But if Massinger cannot be classed as a poet with the least of these, it is no less certain that the best of them cannot be ranked as an artist, I do not say equal, but comparable to Massinger. That, as Coleridge said, he is 'always entertaining'—that 'his plays have the interest of novels'—is but one of the excellent qualities which make the long eclipse of his fame so inexplicable. After the Restoration, when Jonson and Fletcher were set beside or above Shakespeare, Massinger was held unworthy of so much as a bare mention in the numerous and elaborate critical essays of the representative poet and critic of his age. Yet the subjects and the humours of Jonson's comedies must then as now have seemed far more obsolete, more stiff with old-fashioned wit

and rusty with old-world allusions, than the less personal and satirical comedy of Massinger; while the only qualities in which Fletcher excels him beyond all question or comparison are the qualities of poetry and fancy. And it will hardly be contended that these can have appealed with any particular force or likelihood of success to the admiring contemporaries of Etherege and Wycherley. On the other hand, coherence of composition, dexterity of plot, and harmony of parts are qualities which distinguish the best comedies of the Restoration beyond most of those belonging to the earlier and nobler period of English drama: and in these the best work of Massinger is pre-eminent above that of his more inspired and impulsive rivals. And yet it was not till the opening of the nineteenth century that his claims to honour or to notice were adequately or generally acknowledged. The two previous editions of his collected works, now only known even to the special student through the stripping and whipping inflicted by Gifford on their editors, would seem to have attracted but little general attention. There is indeed one memorable passage in the most delightful if not the most invaluable book bequeathed to us by that century, which proves that one great moralist of those days must have laid to heart the moral teaching of this neglected poet. 'Infidelity,' observes Mr. James Boswell—whose wife may possibly have agreed with him; in which case the domestic atmosphere of Auchinleck must have been liable to occasional disturbance—'infidelity is by no means a light offence in a husband; because it must hurt a delicate attachment, in which a mutual constancy is implied, with such refined sentiments as Massinger has exhibited in his play of *The Picture*.'



But when the conscientious devotion of Gifford had fairly brought Massinger to the front, and established his claims to notice and admiration as difficult to exaggerate and impossible to ignore, the reaction in his favour which set in and swept forward must at first seem almost astonishing to those who know anything of the greater dramatic poets with whom he must be compared—I do not say, with whom he challenges comparison: for the modest dignity of his self-respecting reserve precludes the notion of a challenge. It became a question, among men to whom the names at least of Marlowe and Webster should have been known if not familiar, whether Massinger ought not to take precedence, as a dramatic poet, of Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher—and therefore of all other imaginable rivals in the race for the first seat beneath Shakespeare's. The typic Hallam, who thought Racine 'next to Shakespeare among all the moderns,' gave upwards of five pages to Massinger, and less than two to Webster. And in our own day the process of reaction or retribution has been carried so far that a critic so immeasurably superior to Hallam in literary intelligence and ability as Leslie Stephen has brought to bear upon the fame of Massinger so heavy and so well-directed a battery of adverse or depreciatory remarks that no student of the writer attacked can pretend to ignore the breaches made in the outworks of his reputation by the artillery of so formidable an assailant. To me, indeed, it seems impossible or futile to dispute the truth of his main contention. The student of dramatic poetry as it existed in the age which we call the age of Shakespeare will undoubtedly feel, when he comes to the time of Massinger, that he has come to the turning of the tide. The ebb may at first seem all but imperceptible :

yet he cannot but perceive, if perception be possible at all to him, that the inevitable reflux has reluctantly but steadily begun ; that nothing more must be looked for which may bear comparison, I do not say with the masterpieces of Marlowe, Shakespeare, or Webster, but with the masterpieces of Tourneur, Middleton, or Beaumont.

What Fletcher could do, when left alone, may not yet be altogether beyond the reach of ambitious emulation : tragedies as good as *Valentinian* or *The Double Marriage*, if no comedies as good as *Monsieur Thomas* or *The Spanish Curate*, may yet be hoped for—not without diffidence and misgiving ; but the golden has given place to the silver age of English drama. This cannot be denied ; but the silver age of English drama would eclipse the golden age of dramatic poetry in any other nation of modern times. And when Leslie Stephen objects to the admirers of Massinger that his morality is morbid, and proceeds to enforce this objection by the unimpeachable remark that a man who has ‘ a vivid perception of realities and a masculine grasp of facts ’ ‘ will not represent vice as so ugly that it can have no charms, so foolish that it can never be plausible, or so unlucky that it can never be triumphant,’ his reader will remember that we have only to turn to the text of Massinger for evidence no less unimpeachable that the poet was of the same opinion as his critic. Luke and Overreach, the two typical villains of Massinger’s invention, are as charming to those whom they seek to fascinate, as plausible to those whom they seek to inveigle, as triumphant in their good luck till the crash of retribution falls on them, as Goneril or Shylock, as Regan or Iago, as Edmund or as Richard.

On the other hand, it must be allowed that Leslie

Stephen has hit the weak point of Massinger's proverbial morality when he strikes at the sentimental and rhetorical assumption or affectation of belief in the power of sentiment and rhetoric to work miracles impossible in nature. It is certain that the morality which 'makes villains condemn themselves, because such a practice would save so much trouble to judges and moralists,' and 'fancies that a little rhetoric will change the heart as well as the passing mood,' is a morality which 'becomes necessarily effeminate.' If Massinger's morality were altogether or were mainly of such a kind—I do not question that it sometimes is—this epithet would be too lenient and too temperate to define its imperfection or its default. Such an adjective as Catholic or papistical would be more appropriate, and would scarcely be too severe. But I cannot think—when allowance is made for the necessities of stage effect—that this charge can be fairly or even plausibly maintained. When the element of supernatural religion or thaumaturgic theology is brought in to make part of the poetic structure or to quicken the dramatic movement, such monstrous miracles of conversion must be accepted as part of the stage business by the imagination of readers or spectators as frankly as they are accepted, under less reputable conditions, by the greasy and gibbering theologians of the gutter. And when this all-atoning and all-satisfying element of compulsory conversion is not brought in, I hardly think that the revulsions of conscience or the reversions of impulse to which Massinger subjects his characters are so liable as Leslie Stephen represents them to the charge of making those who undergo them or pass through them move and speak like the typical or exemplary puppets of the pulpit or the stage. In the play which heads the

collected works of Massinger the supernatural element of miraculous or transcendent emotion or influence is of course the inevitable law of action and passion which impels hither and thither the agents or rather the patients of the story. The only persons exempt from it are tyrants or slaves—brutal satraps like Sappritius or bestial clowns like the two hideous buffoons who disfigure the background of a beautiful work of art. But the parts of Diocletian and his daughter, which are mainly to be attributed to the temperate and cautious hand of Massinger, are treated with so much artistic reserve and good sense that we can only ‘stare and gasp’ when we find that in Hartley Coleridge’s opinion ‘the superhuman atrocity, obduracy, and blasphemy of the persecutors, of the Princess Artemia herself, one would think would make an atheist shudder.’ The nervous system of an atheist must in that case be as sensitive as the cheek—I will not say, of a young person, but of the most abandoned and hardened libertine: to which all moralists know how proverbially easy it is to bring the shamefaced blush of revolted modesty. This unfortunate princess, on finding herself treacherously betrayed and befooled, breaks out into rather strong language of reproach and denunciation against her false lover and her Christian rival; but the only ‘blasphemies’ in the play, if by the word ‘blasphemy’ we are to understand insult and outrage levelled at the religion of others, are those aimed by the Christian saint and her satellites at the gods of their forefathers. And this form of blasphemy is of course both historically and dramatically justifiable.

The style of Massinger—a style as unlike that of any other English poet as that of Dryden or of Pope; as tempting to imitators as it is inimitable by parasites,

and as apparently easy as it is really difficult to reproduce—is already recognisable in its fullest development of rhetoric and metre throughout those scenes of *The Virgin Martyr* in which his steadfast and equable hand is easily and unquestionably to be traced. It is radically and essentially unlike the style of his rivals : it is more serviceable, more businesslike, more eloquently practical, and more rhetorically effusive—but never effusive beyond the bounds of effective rhetoric—than the style of any Shakespearean or of any Jonsonian dramatist. And in the second play on the list of Massinger's we find this admirably supple and fluent and impeccable style—as incapable of default from its own principle or ideal of expression as it is incapable of rising, like Webster's or even like Dekker's, to a purer note of poetry or a clearer atmosphere of passion—not less complete and rounded, not less pliant and perfect, than in the first act of *The Virgin Martyr* ; ' as fine an act,' said Coleridge, ' as I remember in any play.' That great poet's memory must have been somewhat shaken by indulgence in the excesses of a theosophist and a druggard when he could not remember as fine an act or a far finer act in the plays of one Shakespeare, of one Jonson, or of one Beaumont : ignorant as he seems to have been of what others remember at the mention of such names as Marlowe, Webster, Tourneur, Middleton, and Ford. And his opinion that ' Massinger often deals in exaggerated passion ' is but ill supported by the instance he cites in support of it. The author of *Remorse*—not quite so good a play as *The Unnatural Combat*—was convinced that the protagonist of this tragedy, ' however he may have had the moral will to be so wicked, could never have actually done all that he is represented as guilty of



without losing his senses. He would have been, in fact, mad.' He is represented as guilty of the murder by poison of a wife whose sufferings impel their son to seek his father's life in a duel which results in the death of the patricidal champion of his mother ; and afterwards as overcome by an incestuous passion for a daughter whom he has not seen since her childhood, and whose nubile beauty excites in his savage and sensual nature an emotion against which he struggles with more resolution, and with more abhorrence of a temptation so inhuman and unnatural, than might have been expected from so unscrupulous a ruffian. This is doubtless a tragic record enough ; but to say that it is the record of a lunatic is mere foolishness—a confession of presumptuous ignorance as to the darker elements of human character. A less defensible point is the occasional conventionality of expression ; Massinger, though by no means generally inclined to pedantry or to rant, is liable now and then, for lack of imaginative passion, to stiffen and weaken his style with the bombast and the platitude of cheap classical rhetoric—the commonplace tropes and flourishes of the schoolroom or the schools. ' Blustering Boreas ' and *Æolus* with his stormy issue make their appearance when not only is there ' no need of such vanity,' but when their intrusion chills and deadens the tragic effect and the poetic plausibility at which the writer must be supposed to aim. Compare the last declamation of *Malefort* with any one of all those put by *Cyril Tourneur* into the mouth of *Vindice*. Massinger's, if written in Greek or Latin, would be admired on all hands as deserving of the highest honours that school or college could confer on the most brilliant and vigorous exercise in passionate and tragic verse

which could be attempted in a foreign language by the most accomplished and the most able scholar : Tourneur's would recall the passion and the perfection, the fervour and the splendour and the harmony, which even we at this distance of time, and through the twilight of a dead language, can recognise in the dialogue or the declamation of Æschylus himself.

On the other hand, the grim, narrow, sardonic humour of Cyril Tourneur is not comparable with the excellent comedy which lightens and relieves the fiery darkness and horror of this vehement and high-flown tragedy. The career of the chief comic personage is really worthy to be compared with that of almost any one among Fletcher's comic heroes ; and this is very high praise. Massinger's deficiency in wit would seem to have blinded most of his critics to the excellence of his humour ; which, if less buoyant and spontaneous than Fletcher's in the exuberance of its exultation, is at least as plausible and coherent in the felicity of its invention. All that Coleridge says of the fallacy implied in such figures of mere burlesque as that of the buffoon suitor in *The Maid of Honour* is no less true and rational than pointed and incisive ; they are too wilfully absurd to excite any emotion but that of incredulity, or that of compassion for a congenital infirmity or defect. But such figures as Belgarde in this play, or as Borachia in a later work, are brilliant and vivid creations of observant and original humour.

The objection raised by Coleridge, echoed by Hazlitt, and re-echoed by Leslie Stephen, that the fools or the villains of Massinger's invention are apt to talk of themselves as others would talk or think of them is too often but too well grounded. 'Massinger,' says Coleridge, 'and all, indeed, but

Shakespeare ' (a sweeping impeachment which proves only the wide range of the critic's ignorance), ' take a dislike to their own characters, and spite themselves upon them by making them talk like fools or monsters.' His obsequious backbiter Hazlitt, our English precursor or prototype of Sainte-Beuve, follows suit with the remark cited by Leslie Stephen, that Massinger's villains appear like drunkards or madmen. This objection is supported by Leslie Stephen with far more cogency and felicity of argument than either Hazlitt or Coleridge had brought to bear on it. The passage in which he presses and enforces his impeachment of Massinger on the ground of moral and dramatic veracity is too effective to be passed over or evaded by any champion or advocate who might think fit to undertake the defence of the poet. The ' rants ' of Overreach, he admits, ' are singularly forcible, but they are clearly what other people would think about him, not what he would really think, still less what he would say, of himself. . . . Read " he " for " I," and " his " for " my," and it is an admirable bit of denunciation of a character probably ' (no : palpably and notoriously) ' intended as a copy from life. It is a description of a wicked man from outside ; and wickedness seen from outside is generally unreasonable and preposterous. When it is converted, by simple alteration of pronouns, into the villain's own account of himself, the internal logic which serves as a pretext disappears, and he becomes a mere monster.'

There is so much truth in this that I am not disposed to inquire whether there may not be something to be said in deprecation or extenuation of the charge ; nor will I deny that the singular character of Sforza in *The Duke of Milan* is liable to the imputation of

unnatural and inhuman inconsistency. Massinger was only too lamentably inclined to let moral or theatrical considerations prevail over the claims of dramatic or poetic harmony. The preacher or the scene-shifter supplants the poet or the playwright after a fashion so palpable or so primitive that we are disposed to condone, on comparison, the worst offences of Fletcher against the laws of æsthetic or intelligent art. For in Fletcher's work the levity of treatment is in keeping with the spontaneity of style; with the brightness and lightness of fancy, the headlong ease and energetic idleness of irresponsible improvisation. But in Massinger the sense of an artist's responsibility to himself and to those who are to judge of his work is so singularly and so admirably evident that it would be rather an injustice than an indulgence to extenuate his errors on the plea of carelessness or hurry or fatigue. And therefore, supposing that I wished, I should find it as impossible to impugn as to reinforce Leslie Stephen's impeachment of the dramatist who represents his Sforza in the finest scene of the play as a hero, and in all the other scenes of the play as a miserable and morbid egotist. But when we are told that this play 'may be described as a variation upon the theme of *Othello*,' we can only reply that it might more truthfully be described as a variation upon the theme of *The Comedy of Errors*, or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, or *The Taming of the Shrew*. Each one of these has some minor point in common with it; irritability on the wife's part, jealousy on the husband's, or violence of temper—actual or assumed—on either part. But *Othello*, the most unsuspicious and the most unselfish though the most passionate and the most sensitive of men, has almost as much in common with his destroyer

as with the covetous and murderous egotist who leaves orders for his wife to be assassinated if he should happen to fall in battle.

In spite of this radical and central blemish, *The Duke of Milan* is a nobly written and an admirably constructed play. To do justice to its excellence, we should compare it, not with *Othello*—‘which,’ in the classic phrase of Euclid, ‘is absurd’—but with Ford’s ‘variation’ on the same theme in his abortive tragedy of *Love’s Sacrifice*. Ford was, in the main, a greater tragic poet than Massinger; but the blemish which disfigures the elder poet’s work would be imperceptible in the work of his junior. The action of Ford’s play, like the action of Massinger’s, revolves on the jarring hinges of jealousy and intrigue, malevolence and revenge; but the treatment is puerile in its perversity, while the characters are preposterous in their incoherence. Massinger’s tragedy, whatever objection may be taken to this or that point in it, is a high and harmonious work of art.

But on turning to his next play we find the poet on ground more thoroughly suited to his genius than the ground of pure or predominant tragedy. *The Bondman* is the first, as it is with one exception the best, of Massinger’s romantic plays: tragic in dignity of style, but happy in consummation of event. In this field of work his hand is surer and steadier than Fletcher’s: if it has not all Fletcher’s grace and ease and lightness of touch, its treatment of subject is more serious, its grasp of character more firm, its method of execution more conscientious and more composed. He sacrifices little where Fletcher sacrifices much to sensational and theatrical effect; he is evidently and deeply in earnest where Fletcher seems to be thinking mainly of rhetorical or scenical display.



Compare the famous declamation of Pisander against slavery, in the second scene of the fourth act of this play, with the noble address of Cæsar to the severed head of Pompey in the first scene of the second act of *The False One*. The style of Massinger is *sermoni propior*—nearer the level of eloquent prose: but it has a deeper and a graver note of masculine sincerity in the measured earnestness of its appeal than any that we find in the rushing ripples and the swirling eddies of Fletcher's effusive and impetuous rhetoric.

And here rather than elsewhere we may consider the claims of the noble tragic poem which the inappreciable devotion of Mr. Bullen rescued for the careful study and the grateful enjoyment of all its readers. The tragedy of *Sir John van Olden Barnaveit*, if it be indeed the work of Massinger and Fletcher, now that the date so plausibly assigned to it by its editor has happily been confirmed by such evidence as proves it no less accurate than plausible, ought henceforward to be printed at the head of Massinger's works. I must confess that on a first reading of this play I was hardly prepared to accept so confident a conclusion and so absolute an assertion as to the irrefragable certainty of its authorship with a faith as unqualified or a conviction so positive as Mr. Bullen's. But it seems to me now that his confidence was more justifiable than I thought it at first sight; that the hand of Massinger is as unmistakable in the two opening scenes as the hand of Fletcher in the third. Massinger reappears at the opening of the second act: his vigorous eloquence and his inveterate mannerism, his constant abundance of reciprocal argument and his occasional flaccidity of collapsing verse, could hardly be better exemplified than here. Such a nerveless and invertebrate line as this—'I love a

soldier, and all I can do,' or this—' Upon his favour, 'twill take from his pride,' or this—' How much you promise, to win the old soldiers '—is a characteristic and a grievous example of Massinger's besetting sin as a versifier ; a sin which charity might explain but not excuse as the result of a too studious effort to bring the metrical language of the boards into the closest possible conformity with the actual language of real life. The scene is nevertheless a fine early example of Massinger's rhetorical and dialectic ability. ' This tune goes manly,' the student will say to himself on weighing the solid and vigorous verse with the eloquent and effective reasoning on both sides, and the spirited altercation which succeeds it.

In the next scene it becomes evident that to distinguish between the blended styles of Fletcher and Massinger is a far harder and more delicate task than to distinguish between the confronted styles of Shakespeare and Fletcher. In the last scene, for example, of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the reader stands convicted of eyeless and earless incompetence who cannot see at once and say for certain where Shakespeare breaks off, where Fletcher strikes in, and again where Shakespeare resumes and winds up the broken thread of tragic harmony ; but here, if Fletcher should ever be somewhat less exuberant and fervid or Massinger a little less self-controlled and staid than usual, it becomes a matter of some difficulty to distinguish the swifter from the steadier current in this noble stream of song. But on the whole I take the second scene of the second act—an excellent interlude of comedy—to be more probably Massinger's than Fletcher's. The vein of humour, the cast of dialogue, the sententious turns of phrase, the satire on feminine pretension and its cackling cry for women's rights, are

all of such a nature as to remind us rather of such comedies as *The City Madam* than of such comedies as *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*. To Massinger I should also assign, on similar grounds to these, the authorship of the five short scenes following, full of spirit and movement, which conclude this vivid and animated second act.

An ounce of proof is worth a pound of assertion ; and no more typical example of Massinger's dramatic style could be chosen than the speech of Barnavelt (Act ii. Scene 1) after the refusal of the foreign mercenaries to support the enterprise of his party against the authority of the Prince of Orange :—

Oh, I am lost with anger ! are we faln  
 So low from what we were, that we dare hear  
 This from our servants and not punish it ?  
 Where is the terror of our name, our power  
 That Spain with fear hath felt in both his Indies ?  
 We are lost for ever, and from freemen grown  
 Slaves so contemptible as no worthy prince,  
 That would have men, not sluggish beasts, his servants,  
 Would e'er vouchsafe the owning. Now, my friends,  
 I call not on your furtherance to preserve  
 The lustre of my actions ; let me with them  
 Be ne'er remembered, so this government,  
 Your wives, your lives and liberties be safe :  
 And therefore, as you would be what you are,  
 Freemen and masters of what yet is yours,  
 Rise up against this tyrant, and defend  
 With rigour what too gentle lenity  
 Hath almost lost.

In the qualities of passion and pathos, of poetic imagination and distinction of style, instinctive choice of inspired expression and exquisite phrase, Massinger has many superiors : in purity and lucidity of dignified eloquence he has none. But the eloquence of Fletcher, if less masculine and less thoughtful, has something

of a more poetic quality about it—more impulse and vehemence of impetuous and unpremeditated effusion. The first scene of the third act is a magnificent example of his best style ; indeed, if style were everything in dramatic poetry, we could not but agree with Mr. Bullen that ‘ it shows us Fletcher at his highest ’ ; but this very act, if I mistake not, shows us even higher qualities in the genius of Fletcher than such as can be displayed by the splendid style of even such noble declamation as this :—

I never knew to flatter, to kneel basely,  
And beg from him a smile owes me an honour.  
Ye are wretches, poor starved wretches, fed on crumbs  
That he flings to ye from your own abundance :  
Wretched and slavish people ye are become,  
That feel the griping yoke, and yet bow to it.  
What is this man, this Prince, this God ye make now,  
But what our hands have moulded, wrought to fashion,  
And by our constant labours given a life to ?  
And must we fall before him now, adore him,  
Blow all we can to fill his sails with greatness ?  
Worship the image we set up ourselves ?  
Put fate into his hand ? into his will  
Our lives and fortunes ? howl and cry to our own clay,  
‘ Be merciful, O prince ’ ? O pitied people !

That in the next scene Massinger again resumes the place lately supplied by Fletcher I have no more doubt than Mr. Bullen has. In this play, earlier in date than any other extant from his hand, we find that at the age of thirty-five, three years before the publication of *The Virgin Martyr*, his style was not only formed but fixed ; there is no change, no modification, no development perceptible in any one of his many later works. We find also an exact harmony or rather identity of style between the language and versification of the scenes which are obviously and

indisputably Fletcher's and the language and versification of the scenes undoubtedly written by Fletcher in the play already mentioned, which the all but irrefragable judgment of Mr. Dyce assigned to the joint authorship of Massinger and Fletcher, and which must probably have appeared about the same time as the yet nobler work which we are now engaged in examining. *The False One* is full of brilliant and powerful writing ; but, like the tragedy of *Barnavel*, it is admirable rather on that score than for constructive or impressive merit as a dramatic poem ; the persons represented are rather mouthpieces for fine verse than characters of living men or women ; the development of the story is somewhat lamely and loosely conducted or evolved, and the upshot is consequently less effective than it should and than it would have been if the play had been built up or pieced together after a more dramatic and a more workmanlike fashion. Beaumont, we cannot doubt, would have looked to this more carefully than did the brother in art whom he had left to lament the loss of the younger and greater partner in their poetic firm just three years before the certain date of *Barnavel* and the probable date of *The False One*. And we should not have had to observe and to lament a radical defect in these noble scenes, full as they are of magnificent eloquence and mastery in dramatic debate : we should not have been left in doubt, we should not have had to ask ourselves, in perplexity if not with irritation, whether we, the intended spectators or the actual readers of this play, were expected by the authors to sympathise with the calm and patriotic moderation of the Prince or with the fiery and intemperate enthusiasm of the Advocate.

To hold the balance equally and fairly between



the extreme or excessive assertions or pretensions of principle or opinion on either side of a political or historical question may be the noblest aim and the highest honour of a constitutional historian : it cannot be the sole or the final object of a dramatic poet. Shakespeare, from the democratic or ochlocratic point of view, may have been as wrong as Hazlitt and Hallam thought him—as unjust to the plebeians and the tribunes of historical or legendary Rome : but the tragedy of *Coriolanus*, in consequence and not in spite of that hypothetical iniquity, is a superb and perfect work of art. But here, where we listen alternately to two equally eloquent pleaders of whom we know nothing but that they are equal in eloquence, we feel that the demand made on our imagination, our interest, and our faith is somewhat unreasonable in its exactions. We cannot listen with equal confidence to the orators on either side ; and beyond the effect of their eloquence we are shown no reason, we are given no hint, why our sympathies should be enlisted on this side or on that. And this is so serious and so deep a defect in the conception as well as in the composition of a dramatic poem that we might too justly apply to this otherwise most admirable masterpiece the words in which Barnavelt (Act i. Scene 3) replies to the Prince's threatening suggestion of a cure for his errors which would make him shrink, and shake, too—shake off his head. ‘ You are too weak i’ the hams, sir,’ retorts the Advocate : and this noble poem, considered either as a work of art or as a study of character, is somewhat ‘ too weak i’ the hams ’—too uncertain in its bearings and too equivocal in its effects. Fletcher never thoroughly outgrew this ingrained infirmity of his genius : we find him to the very last only too liable, through

mere weakness of handling or uncertainty of design, to such error or such perversity as impairs or effaces the effect intended : his heroes swagger like cravens, his constancy is unstable as water, and his chastity is more immodest than wantonness itself.

But of Massinger we may confidently and thankfully affirm that no such accusation can reasonably be brought against any of his later and unassisted plays. And to him we must assign the credit of introducing the most beautiful and pathetic figure in all this populous tragedy of *Barnavelt* : though it is to Fletcher that we must pay homage and give thanks for the lovely later scene in which this little figure reappears. In the second scene of the third act the rhetoric is as characteristic of Massinger as the metrical construction and fusion of the verses. The style of the scenes immediately following is all but unmistakable as Fletcher's. The very fine one in which Leidenberch confesses to Barnavelt his previous revelation of their secrets is written exactly in the same running hand, so to speak—with the same impetuous fluency and vehemence of verse, which we find in such typical plays of Fletcher's as *The Loyal Subject* and *The Humorous Lieutenant*. Not only by the headlong rush and exuberance of the metre, the headlong violence and fervour of the dialogue, but by the sensational sophistry and the passionate paradox of the reasoning by which Barnavelt impels into suicide the penitent betrayer of his trust, we recognise beyond all possibility of mistake the hand of the English Euripides. The short scene which follows is as evidently an interlude inserted by Massinger between two scenes of Fletcher's : his curious and vexatious addiction to the use of the ablative absolute—a Latinising habit peculiar to him,

and suggestive of a recurrent stutter or twitch or accent—is no less obvious than objectionable.<sup>1</sup> But the next scene—the sixth of the third act—is in my opinion the most beautiful ever written by Fletcher. Mr. Bullen assigns to Massinger the ‘solemn and pathetic soliloquy’ of the intending suicide: and there are touches in it which recall the manner of a poet somewhat overmuch given to indulgence in classical allusion of a cheap and facile kind;<sup>2</sup> but it is to me absolutely inconceivable that Massinger could have written what I am about to transcribe: for the pathos is suggestive and the writing is worthy of Webster; I had wellnigh written, of Shakespeare:

BOY. Shall I help you to bed, sir?

LEIDENBERCH.

No, my boy, not yet.

BOY. 'Tis late, and I grow sleepy.

LEID.

Go to bed then,

For I must write, my child.

BOY.

I had rather watch, sir,

If you sit up, for I know you will wake me.

LEID. Indeed I will not: go, I have much to do;  
Prithee, to bed; I will not waken thee.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bullen's note on a passage in this scene, explaining the word ‘fry’ as here equivalent to ‘buzz, hiss,’ is surely an oversight. Were this the sense, I do not see how the passage could be either parsed or construed. Grotius threatens, if the prince lays hands on Barnavelt, to set on fire the hall of justice or house of parliament:

His court, our gift, and where the general States,  
Our equals, sit, I'll fry about their ears,  
And quench it in their blood.

Any but the ordinary sense of a word not then so meanly familiar in its sound as now would reduce the whole passage to incoherent nonsense.

<sup>2</sup> I may observe that, while the metre is generally unmistakable as Fletcher's, there is one line in this scene—

If you sit up, for I know you will wake me—

as ‘weak i’ the hams’ as the weakest of Massinger's; but a single metrical slip is a matter of little, or rather of no significance if set against the whole weight of evidence inclining the other way, and impelling us to assign it to the author of *Bonduca*.

BOY. Pray, sir, leave writing till to-morrow.

LEID.

Why, boy?

BOY. You slept but ill last night, and talked in your sleep, too;

Tumbled, and took no rest.

LEID.

I ever do so.

Good boy, to bed; my business is of weight  
And must not be deferred: good-night, sweet boy.

BOY. My father was not wont to be so kind,  
To hug me and to kiss me so.

LEID.

Why dost thou weep?

BOY. I cannot tell; but sure a tenderness,  
Whether it be with your kind words unto me,  
Or what it is, has crept about my heart, sir,  
And such a sudden heaviness withal, too——

LEID. (*aside*). Thou bring'st fit mourners for my funeral.

BOY. But why do you weep, father?

LEID.

O, my boy,

Thy tears are dewdrops, sweet as those on roses,  
But mine the faint and iron sweat of sorrow.  
Prithee, sweet child, to bed; good rest dwell with thee,  
And heaven return a blessing: that's my good boy. [*Exit Boy.*]  
How nature rises now and turns me woman  
When I should most be man! Sweet heart, farewell,  
Farewell for ever. When we get us children,  
We then do give our freedoms up to fortune  
And lose that native courage we are born to.  
To die were nothing,—simply to leave the light;  
No more than going to our beds and sleeping;  
But to leave all these dearnesses behind us,  
These figures of ourselves that we call blessings,  
Is that which troubles. Can man beget a thing  
That shall be dearer than himself unto him?

If the English world of letters owed nothing to Mr. Bullen but the discovery and recovery of such a jewel of dramatic poetry as this—a pearl richer than all our tribe—the debt would be not merely beyond all repayment but beyond all acknowledgment. The famous death-scene of Hengo in *Bonduca* is not more pathetic, nor more delightful

as evidence of Fletcher's almost Shakespearean tenderness for children.

The first three scenes of the following act are composed and written in the same poet's liveliest and most spirited style; but, full as they are of active interest and animation, the most important part of this fourth act bears the evident sign-manual of Massinger. In the impeachment and defence of Barnavelt the poet who was above all things a pleader—who could never miss an opportunity of displaying his talents as an advocate—found his first occasion for such display, and made use of it with such dexterous ability and such vigorous temperance of style as to give promise of even finer future work on the same lines; of such noble instances of dramatic ratiocination as the pleading of Malefort before the council of war, of Sforza before the Emperor, of Donusa before the Viceroy, of Cleremond and Leonora before the Parliament of Love, of Paris before the senate, of Camiola before her rival and the King, of Antiochus and Flaminius before the senators of Carthage, of Charalois before the court of justice (twice in the same play), and we might perhaps add that of Luke with Sir John Frugal on behalf of his debtors. If Massinger, like Heywood, had written a play on the legend of Lucretia, we may be sure that the heroine, on being awakened by Sextus, would have overwhelmed him with oratorical demonstration and illustration of the theorem that such a purpose as his in any man

Were most inhospitable; this being granted,  
(As you cannot deny it) 'tis in you  
A more than barbarous cruelty; kings being tyrants,  
When they prefer their appetites (their conscience,  
As a most dejected slave, cast down and trod on)  
Before their nobler reason. Philomela—



And so forth, and so forth : it would be only too easy to continue. But if the irrepressible barrister too often intrudes or intrenches on the ground of the dramatic poet, it must be allowed that his pleading, if sometimes prosaic in expression and conventional in rhetoric, is seldom or never ineffective either through flatulence of style or through tenuity of matter. In the defence of Barnavelt there is, however, one sign of comparative immaturity in the art of composition which would suffice to distinguish it as the earliest of its author's surviving attempts in this line. It is strange to find Massinger writing as badly as Byron ; but Matthew Arnold's denunciation of a ' famous passage ' in the *Giaour*, ' with those trailing relatives, that crying grammatical solecism, that inextricable anacolouthon,' is but too well deserved by the otherwise effective and forcible speech of that Barnavelt

Who, when there was combustion in the state,

must be supposed to have said or done something ; but what, we can only guess : for this unhappy relative is left hanging in the void, without a verb to support it, over a howling wilderness of ablatives absolute and parenthetical propositions.

The first scene of the fifth act must apparently be divided—' like a bribe-buck,' as Sir John (not Barnavelt) would express it—between the two illustrious partners in this admirable play. The change of style and rhythm from Massinger's to Fletcher's, after the departure of the French ambassadors, must be perceptible to the dullest ear and eye, if not absolutely inattentive or unobservant. The ghastly jocularly of the scene succeeding, in which the three executioners play at dice for the office of headsman to the great

Advocate, is more like Fletcher than Massinger : it may be compared with the farcical hanging scene in the tragedy of *Rollo Duke of Normandy* ; though the humour of this later interlude is very inferior to that of a scene which may remind a modern reader of ' the song that Jack the headsman sings,' as quoted by his friend the friar in the third scene of the third act of the second part of Sir Henry Taylor's master-work. But the final scene which follows is, I should say, beyond all question Fletcher's ; and a magnificent example of his literary and dramatic power. The tragically humorous realism of the part immediately preceding the appearance of the condemned man is as fine in its way and as effective as the stately and fervent eloquence of his last appeals and protestations ; the pathos, if not profound, is genuine, and the grasp of character more firm and serious than usual.

In energetic fertility of invention and fervid fluency of rhetoric *The Renegado* is a fairly representative example of Massinger's most characteristic work : it can hardly be placed in the first class of his plays, but must be allowed to stand high in the second rank. Hartley Coleridge's critical summary of this play is about the best thing in his essay on Massinger and Ford. *The Parliament of Love*, for all the miserable mutilation of its text, is still recognisable as one of its author's most brilliant and animated comedies ; no less graceful and interesting in its graver parts than amusing and edifying in its lighter interludes. In the tragedy of *The Roman Actor*, if the interest is less keen and the emotion less vivid than that excited by the previous tragic poems of Massinger, the equable purity of style and the conscientious symmetry of composition will seem all the more praiseworthy if compared with the headlong and slipshod vehemence

of many among his competitors ; but in the hands (for instance) of Fletcher, the all-important figure of Domitia, though it might have been more theatrical and exaggerative, would have been more animated and interesting than it is. *The Great Duke of Florence*, if remarkable even among Massinger's works for elegance and grace of execution, does not aim high enough or strike deep enough to give more than the moderate pleasure of a temperate satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> *The Maid of Honour* leaves a deeper impression of the very noble and original character which gives its title to the play. The others, with the possible exception of the loyal and single-hearted Adorni, are somewhat conventional in comparison. It is impossible to take any sympathetic interest in the vacillations and infidelities of such half-hearted lovers and loyalists, as figure too frequently on the stage of Massinger ; who must have found them so serviceable in the development of a story, and for the presentation of a nobler nature in fuller relief against their ignoble or pitiable figures, that he could scarcely appreciate or foresee the inevitable effect or impression of such characters—a compromise between indifference and contempt. And it is a serious if not a ruinous defect in the structure of a poem or a play that this should be the impression left by any of its indispensable and leading characters.

In *The Picture*, an admirably written and admirably constructed play, the typically constant and devoted

<sup>1</sup> The generous praise given to this play by a greater tragic poet than Massinger does no less honour to Ford than to the object of these well-turned lines :—

Action gives many poems right to live ;  
This piece gave life to action ; and will give,  
For state and language, in each change of age,  
To time delight, and honour to the stage.

husband and wife are no sooner induced to doubt or to disbelieve in each other's constancy and fidelity than they begin to entertain, however uncertainly and faintly, the notion of revenge or retaliation in kind; and this without the slightest sense of attraction on the wife's part towards her tempters or on the husband's towards his temptress. One of Musset's brightest and gracefulest little comedies covers part of the same ground as this much more ambitious and elaborate play of Massinger's; but the subject is touched with a far lighter hand, and the figures are sketched in fainter but more attractive colours.

In his next two plays, *The Emperor of the East* and *Believe as you list*, Massinger has given a colouring of romance to historical characters—or at least to historical names—which in either case makes the drama something of a hybrid, but a hybrid of no unattractive or unlawful kind. The merit of either play is rather literary than dramatic; not that there is any lack of interest and action, but that, if set beside any play or any poem of strong human interest, the comparative tenuity of composition, the comparative tepidity of emotion excited or expressed, becomes manifest beyond all question. Massinger's *Pulcheria* may be compared with *Corneille's* by those who take pleasure in studying the secondary works of celebrated poets: they have in common at least the gift of sober and dignified eloquence or declamation. But *Corneille's* penultimate play, in spite of some better among many bad verses, is on the whole very dull and rather absurd in style and in design: Massinger's is at any rate vigorous and lively, well written and well composed.

In the very act of reading the Frenchman's dreary tragicomedy, it is difficult even to remember or to

distinguish, among all its wordy and shadowy figures, who is supposed to be in lukewarm love with whom : in reading the Englishman's, if our interest is rather the interest of literary curiosity than of imaginative sympathy, we are at least amused and gratified by the freedom and the fluency of invention and of style. But neither Massinger, Corneille, nor even Sir Walter Scott—though *Count Robert of Paris* is worth far more than the common cry of critics has ever admitted—could succeed in giving life and interest to any subject or to any hero selected from Byzantine history. One only poet has ever done that : and it is not the least among Sir Henry Taylor's many claims to a place of high honour among English poets and dramatists that such a success should have been reserved for him to attain at the very outset of his literary career.

It is a coincidence something more than singular that in his next play, *Believe as you list*, Massinger should again have so nearly anticipated Corneille in choice of subject, place, and time that two of the most important figures in either tragicomedy are identical, and might indeed be recognisable even without the identity of name. And the comparison is here of far more value than before : for Corneille in *Pulchérie* was at his weakest, and Massinger in *The Emperor of the East* was not a little beneath himself at his best. But in the tragic story of Antiochus Massinger has displayed his gift of noble writing and its quality of manly pathos as fully and as impressively as in any of his more famous works : and Corneille, in his corresponding play, has well deserved the triple honour of denunciation from Voltaire, of depreciation from Schlegel, and of acclamation from Victor Hugo. 'Le *Nicomède* si moqué du dernier siècle pour sa



*fière et naïve couleur* ' is in its own way as noble and original a work as Massinger's ; and if the final upshot of neither play is satisfactory to the sympathies or adequate to the expectations of the reader, this is but another point of curious interest in the comparison of two poems equally admirable in vigour of handling and singular in selection of subject. But the parallel runs far closer than this : the *Prusias* of Massinger is essentially identical with the yet more abject *Prusias* of Corneille, the *Flaminius* of Corneille with the yet more arrogant and insolent *Flaminius* of Massinger. And the patient heroism of *Antiochus* under his sufferings is matched by the haughtier heroism of *Nicomedes* in the face of conspiracy and danger. Ford's admirable *Warbeck* is not a nobler or more interesting figure than either. A certain deficiency in constructive power, a certain monotony in dramatic arrangement and effect, may perhaps be found alike in the English and in the French play : there is something of pettiness, if not something of discrepancy or confusion, in the motive and the conduct of the intrigue which winds and unwinds itself around or beneath the central character of Corneille's ; while in Massinger's the varied and protracted martyrdom of an innocent and heroic victim becomes even before we reach the fifth act too positively painful and oppressive for the reader to find relief in any lighter interlude, were it even far more exhilarating than the defiant buffoonery of the indomitable fat *Flamen*. The unmistakable reference in Massinger's prologue to ' a late and sad example ' of royal misfortune ' too near ' the subject-matter of his play—the crushing defeat and the wandering exile of Charles I.'s luckless brother-in-law, the Prince Palatine—is a noticeable instance of his unflagging interest in contemporary

history as well as in social and political questions more particular to England.

His next surviving play, *The Fatal Dowry*, is on the whole the finest example of tragedy he has left us: the most perfect in build, the most pathetic in effect, and the most interesting in development, harmony, and variety of character. The attention and admiration of the reader are seized and kindled at the very opening, and are kept alive and alight to the last moment of the action. And on this occasion we may feel confident in attributing to Massinger all but all that is of value in a work which we owe in part to another hand than his. Nathaniel Field, his colleague in its composition, is a dramatist of genuine and original quality; but it is impossible to suppose that the better and greater part of this play can be either his work or any man's work but Massinger's. Gifford, with commendable candour and good taste, assigns to Field the fine scene (as he justly calls it) in which the last honours are paid to the father of the hero who has sacrificed his own liberty to the claims of filial respect: but except for this one scene we must agree with him in regretting that Massinger did not take upon himself the execution of the whole. His calm command of earnest and impressive eloquence was never put to nobler service: his austere sympathy with self-denying courage or self-renouncing resolution was never more worthily expressed than in the devotion of Charalois to his father and of Romont to his friend. But it is undeniable that the best character in this play—the best in each sense of the word, at once most effective from the dramatic point of view, and most attractive if considered as a separate figure—is a subordinate though neither superfluous nor insignificant person. Romont is one

of the noblest of Massinger's men ; and Shakespeare has hardly drawn nobler men more nobly than Massinger. Fletcher's handling of such characters is absolutely schoolboyish in its perverse conventionality. Massinger's heroes have always some touch of manly reason and loyal good sense which preserves them from the ideal absurdity of Fletcher's alternately blatant and abject materialists.

The figure of the heroine, on the other hand, is too thinly and feebly drawn to attract even the conventional and theatrical sympathy which Fletcher might have excited for a frail and penitent heroine : and the almost farcical insignificance and baseness of her paramour would suffice to degrade his not involuntary victim beneath the level of any serious interest or pity. Rowe, in the play which he founded on Massinger's, has very skilfully removed this blemish. The victim of a Lothario we may pity, excuse, and understand ; the victim of a Novall is fit for enlistment in the sisterhood of the streets. Rowe's place is rather low and Massinger's place is rather high among dramatic poets ; but in this instance the smaller man's poetic or dramatic instinct was juster and worthier than the greater man's. That his play is on the whole immeasurably inferior in composition and execution to the original from which it was rather treacherously conveyed or derived is as certain as that the *Phèdre* of Racine is poetically inferior to the *Hippolytus* of Euripides ; but Rowe's Calista is as much more pardonable than Massinger's Beaumelle as the passionate penitence of the French playwright's heroine is more credible and more interesting than the unimaginable atrocity—the murderous mendacity in suicide—of the Greek's. Nevertheless it is curious to observe the influence of a tradition rather Spanish

than French or English in the deliberate immolation of the wretched girl by her husband's hand before her father's face ; and to compare it with Heywood's treatment of a similar subject in a far less ambitious and a far more pathetic tragedy than any of Massinger's. The English gentleman dismisses his adulterous wife from his house, to live and die in seclusion : the French or rather the Spanish hero butchers his poor traitress in cold blood, after killing her paramour before her eyes and bringing her to trial and sentence from the lips of her father and his benefactor. The situation is theatrically superb ; but the morality—even from the theatrical point of view—belongs rather to the southern than the northern side of the Pyrenees.

In tragedy Massinger was excelled by other dramatic poets of his time : in the line of severe and serious tragicomedy he certainly has never been and probably never will be equalled. The hideous hero of *A New Way to pay Old Debts* may perhaps be now and then too strongly and even coarsely coloured : the epilepsy of rage and remorse which overtakes him in the last scene may be too obviously the device of a preacher or a moralist who thinks rather of impressing his audience with dread of a special providence or a judicial visitation than of working out the subject of a dramatic poem in a natural and logical manner : but for all that, and in spite of his theatrical and incredible expositions of his own wickedness and baseness to men whom he wishes to conciliate or attach, Sir Giles Overreach will always and deservedly retain his place among the great original figures or types created by the genius and embodied in the art of our chief dramatic poets. The spirit, eloquence, and animation of the whole play are not more admirable than the perfect harmony and proportion of all

the figures displayed in stronger or slighter relief by the natural progress of the well-constructed plot. Much of the same praise may be given to the first four acts of *The City Madam* ; and the figure of Luke Frugal, if less imposing and impressive than that of Overreach, is drawn with far subtler skill and finer insight into the mystery of ingrained and incurable wickedness. The self-deceit of the suffering hypocrite, his genuine penitence and humility while under a cloud of destitution and contempt, may probably be accepted as the deepest and truest touch of nature, as it is certainly the most daring and original, to be found in the works of Massinger. Up to the fifth act the conduct of the whole scheme of the play is almost beyond praise : it is lighter and easier, more simple and more clear, than the evolution of Jonson's best comedies : the variety of living character is as striking as the excellence of artistic composition. But all the energetic advocacy of Gifford, earnest and plausible as it is, cannot suffice to vindicate the taste or justify the judgment of a comic poet who has chosen to deface the closing scenes of a comedy with such monstrous and unnatural horror as deforms the fifth act of this play. We know, he pleads, that the inhabitants of Virginia in his days did not offer human sacrifice to god or devil (in other words, that they were neither Catholics nor Calvinists). But Massinger and his contemporaries did not know this, and must be excused for believing that they did. And therefore we must accept as a natural and agreeable incident in a comic poem the projected transportation and immolation of Lady Frugal and her daughters 'as an oblation unto Hecate (!) and wanton Lust, her favourite.' Admitting that so subtle and splendid a scoundrel as Luke



could be fool enough to swallow such a bait and monster enough to entertain such a proposal, we may surely crave leave to object that such a conception is as monstrous, from an æsthetic point of view, in a comedy, as it would be, from an ethical point of view, in real life ; that it jars and unhinges and dis-joints the whole structure of the play. Luke, under the impression of supernatural agency—duped by his former dupes, and befooled by his former victims—is no longer the same man : the supple, pliable, quick-witted, humble, and resentful rascal whom his creator had made as visible and credible to us as Tartuffe himself subsides into a devil and a fool, whom the simplest device can delude and the insanest atrocity cannot revolt.

In these two noble and memorable plays Massinger is no less a patriot than a poet ; his wise and thoughtful interest in matters affecting the social interests of the commonweal is as evident as his mature and masterly power of construction and of style. He was, it is evident, as all loyal Englishmen must be, at once truly conservative and thoroughly liberal in his views and in his aims ; all the more bitter and unsparing in his hatred of corruption and his abhorrence of abuses that he foresaw, as did no other writer for the theatres, the inevitable result of lawless extortion and transgression on the part of the rulers of England. He was the Falkland as Fletcher was the Rupert of the stage ; and a wiser counsellor than ever won the ear of the king who found his dramatic satire ' too insolent ' in its exposure of the royal claims on ' benevolences ' and the royal defiance of the law to be endured without modification or excision. Coleridge's remarks on Massinger as a politician are equally inaccurate and perverse ; nor are his strictures on

the dramatist and the moralist much more valid or profound. It is true that some of his objections to Massinger's treatment of character are not without force; and to the examples which he selects as typically blameable he might well have added that of the judicial frenzy which falls at last as a retribution for his crimes on the head of Sir Giles Overreach.

It has sometimes struck me as possible if not probable that the first actor of this famous part may have suggested or insisted on this tragic exaggeration of its climax. We all remember how a similar addition to the catastrophe of Dr. Johnson's *Irene* was urged upon the author of that tragedy by the fruitless importunity of Garrick: 'The fellow wants me to make Mahomet run mad, that he may have an opportunity of tossing his hands and kicking his heels.' The dumb despair in which Luke finally leaves the scene is as much more impressive as it is more lifelike than the raging desperation of Sir Giles. But there is critical truth as well as friendly cordiality in the pleasant commendatory verses of Sir Thomas Jay, whom Massinger, with characteristic modesty and unselfishness, had rebuked for classing him as 'equal with those glorious men, Beaumont and Fletcher.' The good knight does no more than justice to his friend in applauding

The crafty mazes of the cunning plot,  
The polished phrase, the sweet expressions, got  
Neither by theft nor violence; the conceit  
Fresh and unsullied.

The steady and conscientious independence of his genius and his principles had fully and nobly asserted itself in Massinger's studies from contemporary life in England: in his three remaining plays he has

given a freer if not a looser rein to his fancy, with less of the ethical and more of the sentimental in its action. *The Guardian* is much more like a play of Fletcher's—such a play, for example, as *Women Pleased* or *The Pilgrim*—than any other of Massinger's unassisted works : I need hardly add that its plot is unusually multifarious, improbable, and amusing. It is always excellently and sometimes exquisitely written : there is no very severe or serious grasp of character, though all the figures are as lively and easy as some of the incidents are violent and absurd. *The Bashful Lover*, his next play but one, is little less well written and well arranged, but very inferior in interest, and more markedly conventional in character than any other play of Massinger's ; nevertheless it is an able and in some degree an admirable piece of work.

One play alone remains for us to notice : for there is neither any internal nor any external evidence of the slightest value or the faintest plausibility for Massinger's alleged association with Middleton and Rowley in their comedy of *The Old Law*. But this one remaining play is the flower of all his flock ; so lovely and attractive in its serious romance, so ripe and rich in its broader strokes of humour, so full of a peculiarly sweet and fascinating interest, as to justify more than ever the compliment of a comparison which its author's diffidence had reprovingly deprecated on the lips of Sir Thomas Jay. As I have so lately had to protest against Coleridge's occasional if not general misjudgment of Massinger, I am bound as well as glad to quote his atoning tribute to the merit and the charm of *A Very Woman*—‘ one of the most perfect plays we have. There is some good fun in the first scene between Don John Antonio ’ disguised as a slave ‘ and Cuculo, his master ’—and

more, the greater poet might have added, in the later scenes between each of them and the bibulous wife of Cuculo ; ‘ and can anything exceed the skill and sweetness of the scene between him and his mistress, in which he relates his story ? ’ The exquisite temperance and justice and delicacy of touch in that almost unrivalled example of narrative by dialogue are hardly to be equalled or approached in any similar or comparable scene of Fletcher’s ; but the loveliest passage in it—the loveliest both for natural grace of feeling and for melodious purity of expression—has perhaps somewhat more of the peculiar cadence of Fletcher’s very finest versification than of Massinger’s. Mr. Dyce, in his admirable introduction to the works of Beaumont and Fletcher, suggests that this play may be a recast of an earlier play by those poets—*A Right Woman*, which was ‘ certainly never given to the press,’ and in which ‘ Massinger might have been originally concerned.’ Possibilities are almost infinite in such cases ; but I cannot believe in the probability of any theory which would tend to deprive Massinger of any part of the honour and the gratitude which we owe to the writer of this most beautiful and delightful play. The great argument against the likelihood, if not against the possibility, that Fletcher can have had any hand or any finger in the text as it now stands is the utter absence of his besetting faults. Violent as are the passions and violent as are the revolutions of passion represented in the course of the story, the poet’s aim is evidently to make them appear, if not always reasonable, yet always natural and inevitable ; Fletcher, in his usual mood at least, would have rioted in exaggeration of their contrasts, improbabilities, and inconsistencies. His hunger and thirst after sensation at any price could never have allowed him to be

content with so moderate, so gradual, and so rational an evolution of the story.

That Massinger was both greater and more trustworthy as a dramatic artist than as a dramatic poet has already been admitted and avowed: but this crowning work of his noble and accomplished genius, at once so delicate and so masculine in its workmanship, would suffice to ensure him a place of honour among the poets as well as among the dramatists of his incomparable time. Upon the whole, however, I venture to think that his highest and most distinctive claims to honour are rather moral and intellectual (or, if Greek adjectives be preferred to Latin as more fashionable and sonorous, we will say rather ethical and æsthetic) than imaginative and creative. Be this as it may, there can be no question that the fame of Philip Massinger is secure against all chance of oblivion or eclipse as long as his countrymen retain any sense of sympathetic admiration and respect for the work and the memory of a most admirable and conscientious writer, who was also a most rational and thoughtful patriot.



## JOHN DAY

ONE of the very greatest poets that ever glorified the world has left on record his wish that Beaumont and Fletcher had written poems instead of plays ; and his wish has been echoed by one of the finest and surest critics of poetry, himself an admirable and memorable poet, unequalled in his own line of terse and pathetic narrative or allegory. I am reluctant if not ashamed, and sorry if not afraid, to differ from Coleridge and Leigh Hunt ; yet I cannot but think that it would have been a pity, a mistake, and a grievous loss to poetic or creative literature if the great twin brethren of our drama had not given their whole soul and their whole strength to the stage. I cannot imagine that any poetry they might have left us, had they gone astray after Spenser with the kinsmen of the elder of the two, could have been worth *Philaster* or *The Spanish Curate*, *The Maid's Tragedy* or *The Knight of Malta*. But I do sincerely regret that a far humbler labourer in the same Elysian field should have wasted the treasure of a sweet bright fancy and the charm of a true lyrical gift on work too hard and high for him. John Day should never have written for the stage of Shakespeare. The pretty allegory of his *Peregrinatio Scholastica*, a really charming example of that singular branch of mediæval literature which had yet to find its last consummate utterance in the *Pilgrim's Progress* of a half-inspired but wholly demented and demoralised Christomaniac, is perhaps better reading than his comedies ; and it is not the least of our many

debts to the industrious devotion of Mr. Bullen that we owe to him the publication of this long buried and forgotten little work of kindly and manly and rather pathetic fancy. There is nothing in it of such reptile rancour as hisses and spits and pants with all the recreant malignity of a fangless viper, through the stagnant and fetid fenlands of *The Return from Par-nassus*. We are touched and interested by the modest plea—it is rather a plea than a plaint—of the poor simple scholar ; but perhaps we only realise how hard and heavy must have been the pressure of necessity or mischance on his gentle and fanciful genius when we begin to read the first extant play in which he took a fitful and indistinguishable part. And yet there is good matter in *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green*, however hasty and headlong be the management or conduct of the huddled and muddled combination or confusion of plots. The scene in which poor Bess, driven toward suicide by the villainy of her guardian and the infidelity of her betrothed, first comes across her disguised and unrecognised father, and turns all her own sorrow into pity for him and devotion to the needs of a suffering stranger, is a good example of that exquisite simplicity in expression of pathetic fancy which was common to all the dramatic poets of the divine Shakespearean generation, and peculiar to them :—

Art thou blind, sayest thou ? Let me see thy face :  
 O, let me kiss it too, and with my tears  
 Wash off those blemishes which cruel time  
 Hath furrowed in thy cheeks ! O, couldst thou see,  
 I 'd show thine eyes whom thou dost represent.  
 I called thee father—ay, thou shalt be my father ;  
 Nor scorn my proffer : were my father here  
 He 'd tell thee that his daughter held him dear ;  
 But in his absence, father, thou art he.

It would seem that the very existence and presence of Shakespeare on English earth must have infected with a celestial contagion of incomparable style the very lowliest of his followers in art and his fellows in aspiration. It would also seem that the instinct of such emotion, the capacity of such expression, had died out for ever with the afterglow of his sunset. Even the grateful and joyful appreciation of the legacies bequeathed to us by the poets of that transcendent age is now no natural and general property of all Englishmen who can read, but the exceptional and eccentric quality of a few surviving students who prefer old English silver and gold to new foreign brass and copper.

Shakespeare and Marlowe to the vile seem vile :  
Filths savour but themselves.

Themselves, that is, and their Ibsens. 'Like lips, like lettuce.'

There is some good simple fun too in this homely and humble old play : the Norfolk yeomen are not all unworthy compatriots of Tennyson's immortal Northern Farmers ; there is something in young Tom's reflection, 'Well, I see I might ha' kept company with honest men all the days o' my life ere I should ha' learned half this knavery.' Worse jests than this have found wider echoes of laughter ; and Tom approves himself a good fellow, and a living creature of a real creator, when he risks his life for the blind old beggar : 'I'll take up my lodging on God's dear ground ere thou shalt take any harm.' It is a pity we have lost the double sequel to this play ; I for one, at all events, should rejoice to read 'the second part of Strowd' and 'the third part of Tom Strowd.' His evident popularity does credit to the honest and

wholesome taste of his audience. It is a curious sign of the times that Day and his comrade Chettle should have ventured and found it profitable to venture a trespass on ground preoccupied already by Marlowe, if not by Shakespeare; and we can only wonder whether Duke Humphrey and Cardinal Beaufort reappeared and renewed their tragic wrangling on the stage of the second or the third part of a story transported from the traditional date of Henry the Third to the theatrically popular date of Henry the Sixth. It is perhaps needless to remind any reader that the blind beggar who played his part on the Bethnal Green of our old ballad-mongers was supposed to be the surviving son of the great Earl Simon, blinded and left for dead on the battlefield of Evesham.

A quaint and primitive little play, *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, printed in the year which Henslowe gives as the date of the production of *The Blind Beggar*, who was not to see the light of print till fifty-nine years later, has been conjecturally and plausibly assigned by Mr. Gosse to the hand of Day. The fluent simplicity of rhyming verse is sometimes sweet as well as smooth. In the first scene of the second act there is so singular an instance of the crude and childish licence which allowed an actor in the play to address the audience, that I should have expected to find it a familiar quotation in the notes or commentaries of editors who were scholars, and not such impudently ignorant impostors as have sometimes undertaken a work of which they did not understand the simplest and most elementary conditions. '*(He speaks to the people.)* Well, I pray you look to my master, for here I leave him amongst you.' There are touches of pleasant fancy and joyous music in this evidently juvenile poem which may recall to a

modern reader the lighter moods of Keats. Its author, like the author of *Doctor Dodipoll*, must have had Shakespeare on the brain ; no reader of either play can miss or can mistake the gracious influence of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *The Comedy of Errors*. The pun on the words *Pan* and *pot* anticipates a jest unconsciously borrowed and worked to death by the typically Caledonian humour of Carlyle.

Any form of tribute to the memory of Sir Philip Sidney, any kind of witness to the popularity of the *Arcadia*, does honour to his lovers in the past and gives pleasure to its lovers in the present ; but one at least of these latter must express a wish that the playwrights would have left that last and loveliest of chivalrous and pastoral romances reverentially and lovingly alone. The prologue to *The Isle of Gulls* is a bright and amusing little sample of dramatic satire ; its three types of critic, the lover of libel, the lover of ribaldry, and the lover of fustian, are outlines of figures not unworthy of Ben Jonson. But there is little or rather nothing in the five acts thus ingeniously introduced of the peculiar charm which pervades the whole atmosphere of the *Arcadia* : Day's young princes are mere puppets, with no trace of likeness to the noble original figures of Pyrocles and Musidorus ; not for a moment can his light and loose-tongued heroines, whatever grace of expression and of verse may be wasted on the wanton and fantastic exposure of their trivial inclinations, recall the two glorious sister figures of Sidney's divine invention. There is only one 'person of the play' who has any life or likeness of life in him : the rascally adventurer Manasses, moralist and satirist, informer and swindler and preacher ; a very model and prototype of the



so-called new journalist. The scene in which he explains his professional aptitudes and relates his varied experience is the only vigorous piece of writing in the ragged and slipshod little play; his Puritan sermon anticipates with quite curious precision the peculiar eloquence of Mr. Chadband. There is some rough and ready fun in the part of Miso; but the whole concern is on the whole but 'an indigest deformed lump.' The soliloquy which opens the fifth act has real sweetness as well as smoothness of metre as well as fancy. A few lines may serve to give the reader a taste of Day's simple and gentle genius or gift of style:—

Farewell, bright sun, thou lightener of all eyes;  
Thou fall'st to give a brighter beam to rise:  
Each tree and shrub wear trammels of thy hair,  
But these are wires for none but kings to wear.

For *these* we should probably read *hers*. The play is as carelessly printed as it was carelessly composed.

The gentle minutes, crowned with crystal flowers,  
Losing their youths, are grown up perfect hours  
To hasten my delight: the bashful moon,  
That since her dalliance with Endymion  
Durst never walk by day, is under sail.

What follows is pretty and musical, but these are the best lines.

Shakespeare and Heywood have both touched smilingly on the 'infinite variety' in style and subject of their contemporary playwrights: neither has included in his list of the sundry sorts and kinds of play then aiming at popularity or bidding for success one curious and interesting class, generally perhaps interesting on historical rather than literary grounds: the biographical drama. There are better and there

are worse examples of this kind than *The Travels of Three English Brothers*; the anonymous play of *Sir Thomas More*, which has scenes and passages in it of a quiet beauty and grave charm peculiar to the unknown and un conjecturable writer, is very much better, and probably the finest existing poem of its class; *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, by the new or German Shakespeare, must alike in reason and in charity be hopefully accepted as the worst. The curious and amorphous play in which three men of genius—no competent reader of their remaining works will deny the claim to that distinction of Rowley, of Wilkins, or of Day—took it by turns to dash off a sketch of incidents supplied by report, and to compile a supplement of inventions huddled up at random, is almost equally interesting and disappointing to a student of heroic biography or a lover of the drama which depends on adventure and event. Heywood was the man who should have undertaken this subject: he would have made out of it a simple and a noble work of artless and unconscious art. The three adventurous brothers, whose doings and sufferings, wise or unwise and deserved or undeserved, can hardly be remembered without sympathy by any not unworthy countryman of Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Richard Burton, do not seem to have made any complaint of the liberties taken by their three volunteer laureates with their persons or their names, their characters or their experiences. And yet the representation of a Christian hero, who might conceivably and quite possibly have been sitting among the audience, fastened in the stocks and distended on the rack before the eyes of 'the great Turk,' must make a modern Englishman feel that the honest and admiring enthusiasm of a dramatic poet no greater than Rowley or Wilkins or

Day might be almost more terrible as an infliction than the pitiless and unscrupulous animosity of Aristophanes or Shakespeare or Molière. Cleon or Lucy or Cotin may have held up his head and smiled upon the foolish and vulgar spectator who could imagine him accessible or vulnerable by the satire of *The Knights*, or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, or *Les Femmes Savantes*: an English gentleman must have been a very Stoic if he could so far sacrifice his natural instinct of personal reserve and noble shyness as to abstain from wincing at his exhibition or exposure as a hero and a martyr, on the chance that the groundlings might be kindled and stimulated by his example to a keener sense of religious or patriotic duty.

The quaint and original prologue to this singular play is perceptibly and demonstrably the work of Rowley: who, though assuredly no dunce, would seem to have anticipated the brilliant and convenient theory of certain modern dunces that good metre and musical verse must needs imply tenuity of meaning and deficiency of thought—as in the notorious and lamentable instances of Coleridge and Shelley, whose melodious emptiness and vacuous efflorescence of mere colour and mere sound were so justly and so loudly derided and deplored by contemporary criticism. The singular point in Rowley's case is that he really could write excellent good verse if he chose, but usually preferred to hobble and stagger rather than walk steady or run straight. Lamb, who liked him so well, and took such pleasure in culinary humour, must surely have missed this curious illustration of the process by which fact has to be trimmed up with fiction for the purposes of the historic stage:—

Who gives a fowl unto his cook to dress  
Likewise expects to have a fowl again ;

Though in the cook's laborious workmanship  
 Much may be diminisht, somewhat added,  
 (The loss of feathers and the gain of sauce),  
 Yet in the back surrender of this dish  
 It is, and may be truly called, the same.  
 Such are our acts : should our tedious Muse  
 Pace the particulars of our travellers,  
 Five days would break the limits of our scenes  
 But to express the shadows : therefore we  
 (Leaving the feathers and some needless stuff)  
 Present you with the fairest of our feast,  
 Clothing our truth within an argument  
 Fitting the stage and your attention,  
 Yet not so hid but that she may appear  
 To be herself, even truth.

Eccentric in expression as this apology may seem, I know not where to look for an apter or happier explanation and vindication of the method by which the nudity and aridity of mere casual fact must needs be clothed and vivified by poetry or fiction with the likeness and the spirit of enduring and essential truth. The symbol or emblem is less refined and ingenious than that of *The Ring and the Book*, but hardly less exact in its aptitude of application.

A curious use of a word which conveys to modern English ears none but a very different meaning may be noted in the dedication, where the authors express a modest wish to have 'a safe harbour and umbrage for our well-willing yet weak labours.' One or two necessary corrections or completions of an obviously defective text may be worth transcription :—

Refrain therefore, and [know,] whate'er you are (p. 38).  
 I thank thee : less [or more] I cannot give thee (p. 45).

An over-austere or impatient critic might set down his opinion that the opening scene of *Law Tricks* was less like the professional writing of a sane adult

than the furtive scribbling of a clever child ; that a few pretty verses sprinkled here and there throughout the infantile five acts of this innocent little play could hardly carry weight enough with even the most uncritical reader to make him doubt whether a schoolboy with a touch of ambition to give something like shape to his rudest fancy and something of colour to his crudest emotion might not have written it against time between school hours—and hesitated to submit it to the judicial and jocose opinion of any but his most intimate and most closely coeval friend ; that the two pages are the only satisfactory figures in it—their elders, virtuous or murderous, being comically rather than lamentably like the creatures of such a boy's brain. The mention of 'Justice Slender' in the first scene is noticeable as an early and blundering reference to the text of a play which, though published four years before, can hardly have been known to Day except on the stage ; the hastiest reader of Shakespeare's first rough draft could hardly have confused the two immortal cousins as the memory of a playgoer who had but once seen it acted may apparently if not evidently have done. The dialogue is sometimes bright and pleasant ; it shoots and sparkles through the rhyming retort of fencing epigrams as lightly and gracefully as Shakespeare's in any of his earliest and idlest wit-combats or encounters of fancy. There are not a few notable words and phrases in the text worth registering for an English dictionary that should be worthy to stand beside Littré's ; and there are touches of humour illustrative of manners which might repay the notice of a social historian. This passage, for instance, anticipates the aristocratic satire of *Etherege* : 'Still in the bogs of melancholy ! 'tis staler than tobacco : not so much



but the singing cobbler is grown melancholy, and corrects shoes in humour; fie on't!' <sup>1</sup> That modern American slang has its roots in old or obsolete English is a truth once more attested by this curious passage: 'Why, she is of my near affinity! Should I see my near affinity go in tatters?' (Act ii. Scene 1). It may possibly be just worth notice that the same speaker in a later scene echoes the famous and defiant query of Ancient Pistol, 'Have we not Hiren here?' and it seems to me certainly worth while to note a singularly modern or modern-sounding use of a commonplace adjective just afterwards: 'We will be odd in all things.' I do not know whether camp-ball and football be the same game, but I should guess so from Tom Strowd's offer (*The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green*, v. i.) to 'play gole at camp-ball.' Football was then held a plebeian game—witness Shakespeare, to say nothing of Beaumont and Fletcher. Anyhow, the word is a rare one.

There is about as much substance in *Humour out of Breath* as in a broken thread of gossamer; but even in the slightest and lightest of dramatic play-things misconstrued by the very clumsiest craftsmen who opened their toyshop on the stage of Shakespeare there is a touch, a hint, an indication of something

<sup>1</sup> For 'doubt' (Act ii. Scene 1) we must obviously read 'doubted'—certainly not 'do't,' which is hardly sense, as tobacco is not exactly an aphrodisiac. Profligate the prince is, says the jesting speaker; 'and that which makes him doubted most, he is in love with the Indian punk Tobacco.' In the ninth line of p. 23 'induce' is, of course, a misprint for 'endure.' In the second line of p. 42 a stage direction has crept into the text; the words 'discover Lurdo behind the arras' can only mean '*Lurdo is discovered*'; as part of the speech into which the printer has jumbled them they are mere nonsense. In the sixth line of the pretty rhyming scene which follows, the word 'away' is a palpable mistake for 'awry.' The right reading is pathetic and consistent; the wrong reading stultifies a very graceful passage. On p. 78 there are two consecutive and curious errors: 'ungive' for 'ungyve' (= unfetter), and 'Heate' for 'Hecate.'

more graceful and fanciful and childlike in its pretty silly idleness or waywardness or incompetence than can be found among the wares of earlier or later 'factors for the scene.' Mr. Bullen's generous commendation of such merit as may be discovered in action or in character by a kindly or friendly reader will be accepted rather than controverted by a reasonably good-humoured critic; who nevertheless may be expected to regret that a little more than the less than little which has been was not made of the faintly pencilled outlines and suggestions which promise now and then something better than we find realised in this unsteady and headlong little play. The divine and universal influence of Shakespeare lends it something of life and light and charm; we feel once more that the very humblest and hastiest of his faithful and loyal followers has something to give us which no later stage poet of more vigorous and serious ability, no Dryden or Otway or Southerne or Rowe, can give. There is more merit in the least of these four playwrights, whichever he may be, than it is now the fashion to allow him; but in all those later days of luminous decadence there was but one of their kind who could write a verse or two after the manner of the Shakespearean age in its earliest and simplest expression of dramatic rapture by alternate or elegiac rhyme. No competent judge of poetic style would assign the following verses to a poet or a dramatist of the Restoration:—

Why was I destined to be born above,  
By midwife Honour to the light conveyed,  
Fame's darling, the bright infant of high love,  
Crowned, and in Empire's golden cradle laid;  
Rocked by the hand of empresses, that yield  
Their sceptres formed to rattles for my hand,  
*Born to the wealth of the green floating field,*  
*And the rich dust of all the yellow land?*

Any one who knows anything of the subject, if asked to name at a venture the author of these last two lovely lines, would assuredly name Tennyson. They belong to Nathaniel Lee, and occur in the first scene of the most hopelessly and obviously delirious or lunatic performance that surely can ever have got itself acted. I wish I could find anything in Day so wholly and so delightfully worthy of the hand which wrote the lovely scene of lyric and romantic courtship between Antipholus of Syracuse and Luciana : but there is some light faint breath of the luminous April air which stirs and shines through every scene of Shakespeare's earliest plays in the opening of this fantastic little comedy. And there is something of a higher note in the utterance of the banished Duke's irreconcilable son, when he refuses to acquiesce with his father and sisters in submission to adversity without hope of retribution or restoration, but repudiates all treacherous means of revenge on their supplanter :

I will not play the coward, kill him first  
And send my challenge after.

This almost tragic figure, which might have been borrowed from Marston and tempered or toned down in the borrowing, seems to bring luck to the lesser and gentler poet ; the character of his mistress takes something of life and charm on it when he leaves her, rejected and contemptuous, and the page to whom she has confessed that she ' cannot live without him ' replies, ' O that he knew it, lady ! ' The rejoinder is worthy of a greater and more famous dramatist. ' He does : he would never have left me else. He does.' And the wrangling and love-making dialogue that follows is worthy either of Marston or of Jonson. But on the whole this play might not unjustly be

described as Marston and water. Antonio, though he has some very pretty and fanciful verses to say, is a very thin 'moonshine shadow' of Andrugio. But in lighter things the lighter touch of Day is graceful and pleasant enough; the scene of blind man's buff in which the prisoner escapes by the help of his princess and her page, and leaves his gaoler in gaol, is as pretty an interlude of farce as even Molière could have devised by way of relief to the graver interest of romantic comedy.<sup>1</sup>

In the moral and satirical allegory of the scholar's pilgrimage, for the survival or revival of which Day and we owe sincere thanks to Mr. Bullen, the opening attack on the tricks of tradesmen is noticeable for a realistic force of humour not unworthy of Dekker. The wealth of curious terms and phrases would amply repay the research of a social historian or an intelligent lexicographer.<sup>2</sup> There are such vivid and picturesque touches in the description of 'Poneria, or Sin,' as would be famous if they had but had the luck to be laid on by the hand of no better a poet than Bunyan. For example: 'Her hair, that hung in loose trammels about her shoulders, like fine threads of gold, *seemed like a curled flame that burns downwards.*' The entire allegory is alive with ingenious and imaginative invention of incident and symbol. There are touches of genuine if not very subtle or recondite humour in the seventeenth tractate: the description of 'a kind

<sup>1</sup> In the third line of the second speech of this play there is an obviously ridiculous misprint: the 'steeds still armed' could only have been 'banded with steel,' not 'branded'—or fired.

<sup>2</sup> In his description of Envy, Day uses the word 'hag' as a masculine substantive, and Anger he defines as 'a right low country boot-haler.' The rare word 'swelted' which occurs in the sixth tractate—'the beauteous flowers were nothing else but swelted weeds'—is apparently another form of 'wilted.'

of justice in law ' and his household is hardly unworthy of Fielding or of Dickens ; and ' the new vicar, made out of an old friar that had been twice turned at a religion-dresser's,' is a clergyman fit to stand beside the reverend and immortal figure of Parson Trulliber. In the nineteenth tractate it is curious to come once more upon the old mediæval fable or allegory of human life as a tree growing in the side of a gulf or pit, with God as a raging lion and the devil as a fiery serpent above it and beneath, and the white mouse Day and the black mouse Night ever nibbling at the root of it.<sup>1</sup>

The best known or rather the least unknown of Day's works belongs to the same category of allegorical satire. Leigh Hunt, who spoke of it with his usual and unfailing charm of sympathetic and sensitive appreciation in that delightful book which will always be especially cherished by all to whom his genius and Richard Doyle's are dear, was as right as might have been expected in his objection that the characters who play their parts in *The Parliament of Bees* were too unlike the makers of honey to represent them fairly in sight of the laziest and most indulgent fancy. He knew this quaint and queer and beautiful poem only by the extracts given in Lamb's priceless ' Specimens,' and consequently could not guess that it was mainly intended as a direct and obvious presentation, satirical or panegyrical, of contemporary and characteristic types of men and women under the merely nominal and transparent form of bees. It is a real pity that the happy and happy-making author of *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla* should never have read even the title of the original version unearthed

<sup>1</sup> In the seventh tractate there is a curious phrase which is new to me : ' he is his own as sure as a club,'



by the deservedly fortunate and thankworthy research of Mr. Bullen : ' An old Manuscript containing the Parliament of Bees, found in a hollow tree in a garden at Hybla, in a strange language, and now faithfully translated into easy English verse by John Day, Cantabrig.'—who ventures to append the motto chosen by Shakespeare for the first book which ever bore on its title-page the most illustrious of all mortal or immortal names. Balzac, if not Hugo, might have been interested to learn from the dedication ' how Lewis the eleventh (of that name) King of France took notice, and bountifully rewarded a decayed gardener, who presented him with a bunch of carrots.'

The partnership of Dekker in this work, detected and verified by Mr. Bullen, is confirmed beyond all question by comparison of the good metre in the charming sixth scene with the scandalously slipshod verse which here and there disfigures those which precede and follow it : a perverse and villainous defect peculiar to Dekker alone among all his fellows ; a sin out of which even the merciless lash of Ben Jonson failed to whip him into repentance and reformation. The changes from the manuscript in the printed text are sometimes at least such improvements as transfigure rather poor verse into really good poetry ; and sometimes of a much more dubious kind. A passage which does not reappear in the printed *Parliament of Bees*, but recurs in Dekker's *Wonder of a Kingdom*, seems to me better expressed in its original manuscript form :—

He that will read my acts of charity  
Shall find them writ in ashes, which the wind  
Shall scatter ere he spells them.

In the text of Dekker's play we find this surely inferior version :—

He that will read the wasting of my gold  
 Shall find it writ in ashes, which the wind  
 Will scatter ere he spends it.

But if Wordsworth, Landor, and even Tennyson, did not always change for the better, we can hardly expect a more infallible felicity on revision from Dekker or from Day.

That the third 'Character' belongs to Dekker seems to me evident from the cancelled couplet which announces without introducing an important figure in *The Wonder of a Kingdom*, the disowned and impoverished brother of the profligate and ruffianly braggart. As that gallant and ill-requited soldier is the next 'Character,' this scene must also, I presume, be Dekker's. But it is Day, I think, who touches the loathsome lips of the typical and eternal poetaster—sycophant and slanderer, coward and liar—with indirect and involuntary praise of Persius. I doubt whether Dekker could have construed a dozen consecutive lines of the noble young Roman stoic.

How Day could have had the heart to cancel some of the sweetest lines he ever wrote I cannot conjecture ; but the strange fact is that these pretty verses were struck away from the sixth and gracefulest scene of the most delightful little poem he has left us :—

A pair of suns move in his spherelike eyes ;  
 Were I love's pirate, he should be my prize.  
 Only his person lightens all the room,  
 For where his beauty shines night dares not come.  
 His frown would school a tyrant to be meek ;  
 Love's chronicle is painted on his cheek,  
 Where lilies and fresh roses spread so high  
 As death himself to see them fade would die.

This passage can hardly have been cancelled because the characteristics of fascinating youth described in

it were rather human than apiarian : the whole poem, on that score, would at once deserve the castigation of fire.

The seventh interlude, brightly and lightly written after the ready fashion of Dekker, has just the straightforward simplicity of his satire in its caricatures of parsimony and prodigality, with something of his roughness and laxity in metre. In the ninth and tenth we find him again, and recognise in each the first shape or sketch of yet another scene in the tragedy to which so much was transferred from this as yet unpublished poem. The eighth, a sequel or counterpart to the sixth, is no less evidently the work of Day : as smooth and musical in metre, as extravagant and fantastic in conceit. The two sweet and graceful scenes which wind up the pretty and fanciful web of this lyric and satiric poem are perhaps the best evidence left us of Day's especial and delightful gift ; fresh, bright, and delicate as the spirit and the genius of the poet and critic who discovered him, and gave his modest and gentle name the imperishable and most enviable honour of association with the name of Lamb.

## ROBERT DAVENPORT

THE posthumous fortune of Robert Davenport is unique in the record of English poets. A moderate amount of modest recognition would seem to have fallen to his lot in life ; and then, after a century and a half of all but absolute oblivion, he was discovered and held up to honour by a critic from America. For once it is not to Charles Lamb that we owe the resurrection of a true and fine dramatic poet whose work belongs to the age of Shakespeare—to the half-century which closed on the outbreak of the civil war. Lamb did not discover Davenport till 1827—nineteen years after the memorable issue of his first ‘Specimens.’ Washington Irving had long before introduced him to the readers of *Bracebridge Hall* with a most cordial and generous commendation of a poet who had chosen for his heroine a martyr or confessor to the religion of matrimony.

This was hardly so new or so exceptional a choice as the kindly critic seems to have thought it—forgetting apparently that the creator of Juliet was also the creator of Imogen ; and that Imogen, Hermione, and Desdemona are somewhat more typical and memorable examples of Shakespeare’s women than Juliet, Ophelia, or Anne Page. But we should not consider too curiously—we should not be over-exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain criticism, when it is animated by genuine goodwill and instinct with a cordial sincerity. It is so much to his honour that Washington Irving should have been the first to

introduce Davenport to his countrymen, that we may well overlook any seeming inaccuracy or impropriety in the terms of introduction. He is by no means exceptional among his fellows as an admiring student and a fervent painter of virtue and devotion on the part of an injured and long-suffering wife; nor yet, on the other hand, as an admiring preacher and a fervent advocate of that abject and grovelling servility which was exacted from the ideal wife in ages whose ideal was the prone and preposterous patience of Griselda.

Nor is he, it must in fairness be added, exceptional among the followers of Shakespeare or of Fletcher as a lover and honourer of a far nobler type of womanhood. The heroine of his first extant play is a figure not unworthy to be set beside Ordella and Juliana: nay, a partial though not a disingenuous advocate might be permitted to plead that she is a more real and credible angel, less excessive and 'exaggerative' in her devotion, than is either of these. Nor can I agree with Mr. Collier's verdict that 'Davenport's production is inferior in most respects to the earlier work of Chettle and Munday' on the same subject. No doubt it 'goes precisely over the same ground, and' (we must admit) 'with many decided marks of imitation, especially in the conduct of the story'; but what is best and most characteristic in Davenport's work is not only not derived from Chettle's, but is apparently inspired by a wish to do better and a resolution to do otherwise than his predecessor. The two plays, valuable in themselves to all lovers and students of dramatic poetry, are invaluable as types of the sunrise and the sunset of the Shakespearean half-century. The earlier playwright's touch is lighter and swifter, but his method is thinner and shallower:



Davenport has followed very closely on his track—as closely as Shakespeare on the track left open by the author of *The Taming of a Shrew*: but, like Shakespeare, he has deepened the lines and heightened the colours of the original poem. Chettle's Fitzwater is an admirable sketch, admirably completed by Davenport: Davenport's King John is perhaps less real and credible—he is certainly more effusive and poetic in his penitence—than Chettle's.

It is amusing to find in Mr. Bullen's reprint of the first edition that among the actors of *King John and Matilda* the representative of the venerable hero Fitzwater was one 'whose action gave grace to the play,' and that the murderer Brand was represented by an actor 'who performed excellently well.' These two were evidently recognised by the audience as the most effective and important figures in the composition of the play; though the eponymous persons are presented in a careful and workmanlike manner. There is true and keen pathos in the horrible scenes which represent the agony of a mother and her child slowly starved to death under the eye of their jeering gaoler: but few if any readers will differ from Mr. Bullen's objection that even tragedy has no right to deal with such harrowing elaborations of physical horror. Nevertheless it must be allowed that the picture of a noble child's affectionate courage and devotion is as beautiful as the situation is hideous; and that Davenport has at least spared us one dreadful detail on which his predecessor had expatiated—the fruitless attempt of the mother to feed her dying child with her own flesh and blood. Still on the whole he is the crueller of the two in his expansion and prolongation of the intolerable scene: though we may admit that he has nowhere else shown anything like such intensity

of tragic and pathetic power. It is little less than bewildering to compare the remorseless and fearful realism of these revoltingly admirable scenes with the vile fantastic jargon of John's parting address to Matilda in the first scene of the play. Davenport has here successfully emulated the demerit of the worst passage in Chettle's tragedy—that in which young Bruce gives vent to what he too truly calls his 'execrable execrations.' Lamb has done no more than justice to the 'passion and poetry' of the last scene: quaint and exuberant as the rhetoric may seem to a modern reader, it is singularly beautiful and musical as a close to so dark a tragedy.

The excess of stale second-hand euphuism in the poetical or sentimental parts of *The City Nightcap* is evidently due, as Mr. Bullen has shown, to the servile and belated fidelity with which the author has followed an already obsolete model in the artificial and overloaded style of Robert Greene. In the very first scene there are no less than six direct plagiarisms from the text of the romance by that poet on which the play is mainly founded: and there is not one of these passages which would not be better away. Was it modesty, sheer laziness, or inveterate admiration for an early favourite, which so woefully misguided a poet who could write when it pleased him with such masculine purity and simplicity? The barren and cumbersome profusion of these faded artificial flowers, colourless now and scentless always, is not the only fault of a play in which there is so much of interest, pathos, passionate and poetic beauty. The virtuous hero is a most vile rascal—a bloody and cowardly cur; while the irrational brutality and the infernal rascality of a Leontes who is also an Iago—of a jealous husband whose jealousy induces him to hire false witnesses

against the honour of his wife—are too plainly the qualities of an incurably criminal lunatic to make it possible or leave it credible that such a demoniac should be capable of repentance and reform. This fault is common to Greene's story and Davenport's play; but one of the finest passages in the latter is very closely modelled upon the fervent and eloquent prose of the older poet. Noble as are the parting speeches with which the innocent victims of perjury take leave of their betrayer in the trial scene of the play, it is to Robert Greene, and not to Robert Davenport, that the main honour is due for their piercing and pathetic eloquence. Indeed, the protest of Philomela is much finer, more dignified, and more proper than the more piteous appeal of *Abstemia*.

But the admirable if audacious broad comedy of the underplot is unsuggested by anything in Greene's novelette. Davenport is always more original and usually more powerful as a comic than as a tragic writer. A curious if also an undesirable or indeed regrettable result of the poverty in stage properties which otherwise so happily distinguished the Shakespearean theatre was the possibility of such a bedroom scene as that which opens the second act being represented by any actors and tolerated by any spectators. The nakedness of the stage must have served, as it were, as a screen or a veil for the nakedness of the situation: which would otherwise have defied even the impudence of a Wycherley to venture on it, and might have made the chaste muse of Aphra Behn (first inventress though not sole patentee of the heroic negro) blush like a black dog—of the fairer sex.

In 1639 two little poems by Davenport, as well

as his dramatic masterpiece, were given to the press. *A Crown for a Conqueror* is suggestive rather of a fool's cap for the poet : I am confident that Quarles has left behind him no worse trash. The ' Dialogue supposed between a Lover and the Day ' is a very different piece of work : it is even exquisitely pretty here and there, and written, as the author says in his dedication, ' rather with a native familiarity than an impertinent elegancy ' : which latter phrase would be only too appropriate a designation, too accurate a description, of his own too frequent style. *A Survey of the Sciences*, now first printed, is equally quaint, ingenious, and humorous—sometimes intentionally but oftener unintentionally provocative of a smile.

By far the best of Davenport's three surviving plays is that one which had never been reissued until 1890. *A New Trick to Cheat the Devil* is a masterpiece in its way, though it may be but ' a stumbling-block ' to readers who cannot imagine themselves more credulous or otherwise credulous than they are, and ' foolishness ' to such as will not understand that the superstitions of their forefathers were no whit more irrational and idiotic, unmanly and unworthy, than those which lead fools by the nose—by the nose of a palpably insensitive intelligence—on the track of the male and female Sludges who reap so rich a harvest from the typical idiocies and the representative lunacies of our own sagacious and contemptuous age. The construction of this externally eccentric play is so ingenious that the final solution, though admirably sufficient when we come to it, hangs far beyond conjecture, swings high out of apprehension, till the very close and consummation of it all ; the supernatural machinery is so deftly handled, and so naturally

adapted to the situations of the subjects on whom it is set to work, that on a first reading it may probably and plausibly seem as real and serious as in other plays of the same age—*A Mad World, my Masters*, or *Grim, the Collier of Croydon*; and yet, when the unexpected explanation is sprung upon us, and the terror is resolved into laughter, and divine admonition relaxes into human reprobation, the upshot is as satisfactory, and if the date of the play be considered is even as plausible, as that of any more famous and elaborate comedy applauded by the admirers of Congreve or of Sheridan. The style is far better and purer than that of Davenport's other two plays: the flowery verbosity which decorates and disfigures them is happily absent here. Nor do even the quasimiraculous incidents of the story tax our faith or outrage our patience so severely as those of Fletcher's *Night-Walker*—by no means one of its illustrious author's worst plays. The more serious parts of Davenport's tragicomedy may well sustain a comparison with Beaumont's work as well as Fletcher's; for the vigorous and masterly metre, infinitely superior to that of his two other plays, is but the natural and fitting raiment for the fresh and virile humour of dialogue and situation.

The exposition of the play is bright, brief, and straightforward, though the rhapsody in which Slightall plights his faith to Anne Changeable is about the worst piece of sheer nonsense to be found in the whole blatant record of euphuism. It does not prevent her father from giving his consent and blessing; but Mrs. Changeable opposes the match on behalf of the young Lord Skales, who has sent a proxy to propose in his name for her daughter's hand. Anne, forgetful of the fascinating and seductive eloquence



which has just paid homage to 'those intrammelled rays, those starry eyes Endymion blushes on' (whatever that may mean), 'those ruby lips, where a red sea of kisses is divided by rocks of pearl,' is easily persuaded to accept the nobleman and forsake the commoner; who thereupon, like any modern French hero, abjures 'affection and all loyal love,' and resolves to seek comfort in the career of a professional seducer and rioter. A usurer is found ready to make his profit of this rational resolution, on the assurance of the scrivener with whom he deals that the youngster is 'well possessed,' having 'three fair lordships, besides sheep-walks, parks, and other large demesnes,' and that under the influence of a man of his who soothes him up in all his riots, and leads him to gamble and guzzle in places of bad fame, he may be led to sell his landed property on terms convenient to the conspirators. His honest and loyal servant Roger is unable to counteract the influence of this pimp and swindler Geoffrey; but the eloquent simplicity of his remonstrance may remind us of that admirable song on which Leigh Hunt wrote so admirable a commentary, *The Old and Young Courtier*.

The opening of the second act is as vivid and animated as was the opening of the first. Changeable begins by maintaining a better fight than Major Ponto or poor Frank Berry could have attempted against an imperious wife and an ambitious daughter: but Thackeray himself could hardly have bettered the sardonically comic effect of the scene when the noble suitor arrives, and disgusts the young woman who but a moment before was revelling in the reflection that his lordship was coming to see her ladyship. Mrs. Changeable's prostrate exultation could hardly have been bettered by any dramatic satirist—hardly even

by Congreve or Molière. 'I feel state come upon me,' says her daughter ;

Speak, good mother,  
How shall I bear myself ?

The worthy Mistress Changeable is at no loss for an answer :—

Why, such at first  
As you must be hereafter ; like a lady,  
Proud, but not too perverse ; coy, not disdainful ;  
Strange, but yet not too strait ; like one that would,  
Were she well wooed, but yet not to be won  
Without some formal courtship : had it been  
My case, my wench, when I was young like thee,  
I could have borne it bravely. See, he 's come ;  
Husband, your duty ; *girl, your modest blush,*  
*Mixt with a kind of strange but loving welcome.*

This last touch seems to me worthy of Shakespeare rather than of Jonson. Anne, however, is even more disgusted than disappointed at sight of his luckless lordship ; and the satire aimed at the superstition or tradition of titular nobility is as remarkable as Chapman's attack on the institution of monarchy in a play which had been printed thirty-six years earlier. The spirit, humour, and vigour of the dialogue, till it rises to the culmination of contempt in Anne's inquiry whether her new suitor could not lend his lordship to a friend whom, had he but that slight addition, she gladly would embrace, may bear comparison with the work of any comic poet but Shakespeare. The squabble between the usurer and scrivener over the leavings of their victim is excellent ; there is hardly in all Ben Jonson's work a better or neater little bit of satiric realism ; but the next scene has merit of a higher kind. Slightall, now thoroughly ruined, takes leave of his good and his evil counsellor like

a generous and good-humoured gentleman : the honest Roger begs his master to keep the money bestowed on him at parting, and refuses to take it except as 'a steward to your use, and always ready to furnish your least wants'; but the unlucky fellow is now so case-hardened against all coming troubles or comforts that even the appearance of Anne, in a penitent and pathetic state of mind, cannot move him to give over his fancy of applying to the devil for redemption from present wretchedness. Mad with misery and indignation, he rejects her offers and repels her apologies; breaks from her, and leaves her in a rage of repentance, for the treason of which she will not hold herself guilty—the true culprits being 'her mother and that lord.'

The third act, by way of relief, changes both scene and tone, style and subject, after a fashion somewhat astonishing to modern readers; but the episode contained in it is a consummate and a blameless example at once of the broadest and the highest comedy. Old Friar Bernard and young Friar John, belated after nightfall on their return from visiting the sick, take shelter under the roof of a hostess who in her husband's absence has only a cock-loft at her disposal; in which she has no sooner locked up her reverend casuals than her lover the constable knocks at the door, bringing a couple of manchets and a bottle of wine. She lets him in, and produces for his entertainment a roast chicken piping hot, warning him not to speak loud enough to wake the two abbey lubbers whom she has locked up fast, being unable to get rid of them, with neither light nor bed nor any other comfort. Friar John, however, finding these conditions not overconducive to a good night's rest, peeps down from the cock-loft, and is watching with hungry envy the festive preparations below, when they are cut

short by a fresh knock at the door and a call from the hostess's husband outside for admittance. The constable is in an agony.

Dost thou not think he 'll spare an officer,  
But fall on the king's image ?

He creeps under the bed : the supper is whisked into a cupboard, the fire put out, and the host at length admitted. He has travelled hard, and is very hungry ; be the time of night what it may, something he must and will have : his wife is obliged to rekindle the fire. The worthy host, now in high spirits, expresses a wish for company : ' I had not such an appetite to be merry for an hour this seven year ; that I could tell where to call up some good fellow that I knew ! we would not part these two hours.' The vigilant Friar John takes this as his cue, and forthwith makes such a noise in the garret that the hostess is compelled to confess what guests she has locked up in the straw-loft. He beshrews her for giving no better welcome to the very men he would have wished to meet with, and sends her up to release and bring them down. Unluckily, there is nothing for supper ; ' not so much as a cantle of cheese or crust of bread that can this night be come by,' protests the inwardly furious hostess. But Friar John, to the horror and amazement of his superior, offers to procure supper by art magic, and conjures the demon Asteroth to provide a couple of loaves baked in Madrid, the best wheat being in Spain ; bids mine host put but his hand into the corner, pull them forth and place them behind the salt. Next, he calls for ' a cup of divine claret ; no, a bottle of some two quarts ' ; and the host finds it in the place indicated. Asteroth must be but once more employed as purveyor, and

318 CONTEMPORARIES OF SHAKESPEARE

provide a pullet piping hot : he, John, smells it smoking, and sauce to it. Ay, but where ?

JOHN. Somewhere about this room : who hath the key  
Of that same cupboard ?

HOST. Marry, Nan, my wife.

JOHN. Call for it, good mine host.

You see I come near nothing, use fair play,  
Saw neither fire nor candle to provide this,  
Touched neither lock nor key within your house,  
But was asleep i' the straw ; unlock, mine host,  
See what the cupboard yields.

The men fall to and sup heartily. ' Good dame,' says the attentive John, ' methinks you do not eat.' ' I could eat *thee*,' mutters the hostess to herself. The host now naturally wishes for a sight of so obliging a devil as Asteroth ; but John assures him that it must be under some other likeness than his own, or the sight of him in his terrors would drive the spectator mad.

Have you no neighbour whom you best affect,  
Whose shape he might assume to appear less terrible ?

HOST. Yes, twenty I could name.

JOHN. Soft, let me pause ;

It must be some that still wake at these hours,  
We have no power o'er sleepers : say I bring him  
In person of some watchman ?

HOST. No shape better.

JOHN. Or in the habit of your constable ?

HOST. Why, he's my honest gossip.

JOHN. Why, then, his.

But, mine host, resolve me one thing : should great  
Asteroth appear to you in your gossip's shape,  
How would you deal with him ?

HOST. Why, as my friend,

My neighbour and my gossip.

JOHN. No such thing :

You must imagine him what he appears,  
An evil spirit, to kick him and defy him



As you would do the devil : otherwise,  
 When you are late abroad, and we gone hence,  
 He 'll haunt your house hereafter.

Is it necessary to add that after a thunder-peal of resonant invocations Asteroth appears as required 'from underneath the bed, in shape of Master Constable,' to be forthwith kicked out of the room? and that the hostess follows to let him out of doors, 'lest he should bear down part of the house'?

JOHN. We 'll take our leaves ; make much of our good dame,  
 And think no worse of your good officer,  
 Your gossip and your neighbour, in whose form  
 Asteroth so late appeared.

\* \* \* \* \*

Only commend us to my dame, your wife,  
 And thank her for our lodging.

The jest, of course, is old enough ; but I cannot imagine that it can ever have been presented with such fullness of comic effect, such ripe and rich humour, or such excellent spontaneity and simplicity of natural and artistic style.

The next scene brings us back into an atmosphere of more serious emotion. The faithful Roger refuses the proffered patronage of Lord Skales, and tells him he has driven a better man than himself to ruin—one whom his old servant will follow 'to his grave, or to his better fortunes.' Anne denounces his lordship to his face as a noble thief who has stolen a contracted wife from her husband ; her father as a gentle fool, her mother as a scold, and the subordinates according to their respective deserts. Her noble suitor, however, is rather attracted than repelled by the ingenuous expression of her high spirit.

To modern unbelievers in demonology the incidents

of the two terminating acts, though excellently constructed and arranged, may probably appear too extravagant to evoke any more serious interest than that of perplexed curiosity. But the solution is so ingenious, and the stage effect of it so striking, that the play cannot fairly be said to fall off in merit towards the close ; and enough has now been shown of it to justify the claim of its author to honourable remembrance, and to enhance the claim of his editor to our deepest and most cordial gratitude.

## THOMAS NABBES

IN the second issue of Lamb's *Selections from the Dramatic Poetry of the Shakespearean Age*, we find for the first time the name of Nabbes admitted to the company of names honoured by the notice of the greatest and surest critic that ever wrote or ever will write on a subject of unsurpassable interest to any historic student of English letters and of English character. This name was hardly worthy of inclusion in the priceless volume which first revived and revealed to modern readers the now deathless glories of Marlowe and of Webster, of Dekker and of Ford ; but to all true lovers of the incomparable and unapproachable work bequeathed us by our greatest school of writers it will seem worthy of honourable mention. Nabbes is to Shirley what Shirley is to Massinger ; but the inspiration then afloat and alive in the air of English poetry was so strong and keen and true that even the subordinates of the subordinates of Shakespeare are still and will always be memorable men. Any other nation but theirs would have long since registered their names among those which ought not to be forgotten.

*Covent Garden*, his earliest extant play, may be remembered as a late and slight example of a class which contains such admirable masterpieces as *Eastward Ho !* and *Every Man in his Humour* ; the realistic comedy of old-world London. It is 'pleasant'—as its title-page not too arrogantly affirms—for students of the time who can be content with a modest

allowance of comic or farcical humour interwoven with serious action and emotion. The more ambitious and eloquent rhetoric of the graver scenes has now and then some savour of the great style then gradually dying out ; but the best character is the really humorous and original figure of the 'complimenting vintner'—a new and amusing specimen of the old English host.<sup>1</sup>

In the dedication of this comedy Nabbes compares Suckling to Pindar and himself to Bacchylides—Apollo alone knows why. He should have been sentenced to translate into Pindaric verse the immortal *Ballad on a Wedding*. His next attempt found no such distinguished patron, and suggested no such inexplicable comparisons. The 'pleasant' comedy of *Tottenham Court* is only less unpleasantly unsatisfactory than Suckling's own abortive and illegitimate plays to the lover of comedy or melodrama. There are glimpses in it of a poet, and there are traces of a dramatist ; but the incidents and the intrigues, instead of being fused or welded into harmony by the strong hand of a poet or the technical skill of a playwright, are not so much as pasted or stitched together with any decent pretension to plausible coherence. It is as far from success on the lines of Etherege and Wycherley as on the lines of Jonson or Fletcher. There is matter enough in this failure for one romantic comedy of an earlier date and for more than one realistic comedy of a later ; but there is a plentiful lack of construction, composition, dramatic tact and inventive instinct. These awkward and abortive efforts

<sup>1</sup> A word rather overfamiliar as the synonym of the French *chauvin* occurs—to me unintelligibly—in the fifth scene of the third act : 'pity from an Executioner, or bashfulness from a Jingo.' The editor suggests no explanation.

of a decadent school may be found serviceable if not valuable as foils to the finished and admirable work of the great comic dramatists who arose at once after the Restoration. There is here some little savour lingering of poetry, of sentiment, of honest love and cordial simplicity; but it is unmistakably flat and stale. Manners and morals are not very far above the later level: in wit and humour, strength of hand and excellence of workmanship, there can be no possible comparison. How far this anæmic and crestfallen generation of pithless poets and nerveless dramatists had sunk below the level of their fathers' days may be measured by the fact that a typical gallant of their pitiful time can find no stronger evidence to offer of his devotion to women than this: that he would not only 'spin, or thread their needles,' but even 'read Spenser and the *Arcadia*, for their company.'

Euripides himself could not have written a tragedy more spiritless and shapeless, more imbecile and insipid, than *Hannibal and Scipio*. The yawning reader will be reminded, and will yawn again over the recollection, of Lodge's *Marius and Sylla*. There are touches of rhetoric less merely vacuous than usual here and there; the style and the metre are not so piteously prosaic as those of the dramatic date when James Thomson and Samuel Johnson were taken for dramatic poets; but the two distinguishing qualities of the verbosity which pervades and dilates it are flatulence and platitude.

When Lee makes temperate Scipio fret and rave,  
And Hannibal a whining amorous slave,

he is less unbearably unreadable than Nabbes.

*The Bride* is a play which would have done no



discredit to Shirley : it stands well above his worst or hastiest comic work, if far beneath his thoughtfulest and his best. We may think that ' the picture would have been better if the artist had taken more pains ' ; and again we may doubt. There is something flaccid and relaxed in the constitution or composition of this comedy : it has enough of real and vital merit to surprise and disappoint the reader who finds it on the whole so strangely wanting in the vigorous and coherent sufficiency of a really good play. The broad comic effect of one character, ' an owner of rarities and antiquities,' is exactly such as we find in the personal caricatures which still amuse the too infrequent reader in Foote's comedies or farces : and the humour of the arrogant and amorous French cook anticipates the more finished and maturer dignity of Thackeray's immortal Mirobolant. The simple justice and his imperious wife are really good studies in the school of Jonson. It is something for a writer of the Shakespearean decadence to have shown himself at once a not unworthy follower and a not unworthy precursor of men so far greater than himself as the authors of *Pendennis* and *The Silent Woman*.

The tragedy of intrigue is a subordinate form of drama which cannot flourish but in a period of decadence, and cannot but flourish then. There are much worse examples of it extant in our own literature than a luckless play which was ' denied the credit which it might have gained from the stage ' on which the author's previous attempt at tragedy had found acceptance or toleration. It is not easy to imagine the reader who would not rather read or the audience who would not rather sit out the five acts of *The Unfortunate Mother* than the five acts of *Hannibal and Scipio*. And if the eye of Charles Lamb had happened to rest or

to alight on the following lines, they would, if I mistake not, have had a fair chance of being embalmed for immortality :—

If greatness  
 Were not a relative to all that 's good  
 And glorious in the general speculation  
 Of things that do affect us, not in sense,  
 But the bright part of reason, emulous man  
 Would not through danger manage actions  
 So full of wonder, nor employ his faculties  
 In high designs : but like a heavy lump  
 That only by its weight moves to its centre,  
 And there sleeps, so should we : leave not so much  
 As the record of any memorable  
 And brave achievement, for a monument  
 That once such men had being.

This passage is worthy of Massinger or Ford.

*Microcosmus* is an ingenious and graceful masque, with enough in it of humour and poetry to keep the fancy and invention which they serve and inform alive and agreeable to the taste of modern readers not overintolerant of facile moral allegory. The lesser masque of *The Spring's Glory* is noticeable only for the quaint and amusing passage at arms between Christmas, Shrovetide, and Lent. There is no greater matter to be looked for in the minor poems of a minor poet ; but a tolerant curiosity may be amused now and then by some of those appended to this masquetelet. The modest and good-humoured author may never find many readers ; but none will regret the time spent on reading him, or question his claim to a place among English poets above the station of many whose names, if not their works, are more familiar to the docile and conventional student of English poetry.

## RICHARD BROME

IF the futile and venerable custom of academic disputations on a given theme of debate were ever to revive in the world of scholarship and of letters, an amusing if not a profitable theme for discussion might be the question whether a minor artist of real and original merit is likelier to gain or to lose by the association of his name with that of a master in his art. And no better example could be taken than that afforded by the relation of Dick Brome to Ben Jonson. The well-known first line of the commendatory verses with which his master and patron condescended to play the part of sponsor to his first comedy must probably be familiar to many who care to know no more than that Ben had 'Dick' for a servant once, and testified that he 'performed a servant's faithful parts'; and further, that when Dick took to play-writing Ben encouraged him with sublime condescension and approval of the success attained by his disciple through dutiful observation of those laws of comedy 'which I, your master, first did teach the stage.' From this Olympian nod of supercilious approbation it might be inferred, and indeed has very probably been inferred by the run of readers, that Brome, as dramatist and humorist, was little or nothing more than a shadow or an echo, more or less definite or distinct, of his master's figure and his master's voice. And unquestionably he must have learnt much and gained much by such intercourse and such discipleship. His first play, *The Northern Lass*, appearing and succeeding

as it did under the kindly if haughty patronage of his master, and deserving as it certainly was of that patronage and success, might perhaps have been better and might perhaps have been worse if the author's agile and active talent had been uninfluenced and unmodified by the rigid example and the imperious authority of Ben Jonson. The stage is so crowded and the action is so crossed by the coming and going of so many ludicrous and serious figures, that the attention if not the patience of the reader is overstrained by the demand made on it; and the movements of the figures through the mazes of a complex dramatic dance are not so happily regulated as to avoid or to avert an irritating sense of confusion and fatigue. But there are scenes and touches of character in it worthy of very high praise: the gentle heroine, tender and true (if somewhat soft and simple) as a 'northern lass' should appear in compliance with tradition, is a figure very gracefully outlined, if not quite adequately finished or relieved: there is something more of sentimental interest or romantic suggestion in the ingenious if incomposite plot than might have been expected from a disciple of Jonson's: and the direct imitation of his Bobadil and Master Mathew is too lively and happy to be liable to the charge of servile or sterile discipleship. And there are few scenes in all the range of serio-comic drama more effective and impressive on even a second or third reading than that in which the friend of an intending bridegroom attempts to break off his match with a woman whom he believes unworthy by denunciation of his friend's imaginary vices, and is fascinated himself by the discovery of her unshaken and unselfish devotion.

The modern reader of this play, the earliest attempt

of its author and an excellent example of his talent, will probably be struck by the evidence it affords that Brome in our own day would have won higher distinction as a novelist than he did in his own as a playwright. Were he now alive, he would be a brilliant and an able competitor in their own field of work and study with such admirable writers as Mrs. Oliphant and Mr. Norris. His powers of observation and invention were not, if I mistake not, inferior to theirs ; and the bent of his mind was not more technically dramatic. In fact, his characters are cramped and his plots are distorted by compression into dramatic shape : they would gain both in execution and in effect by expansion, dilation, or dilution into the form of direct and gradual narrative.

The opening scene of *The Sparagus Garden* is as happily humorous and as vividly natural as that of any more famous comedy. Tim Hoyden is a figure not unworthy of comparison with Sir Mannerly Shallow in Crowne's excellent broad comedy of *The Country Wit*—as that rural knight may be held worthy to rank as a precursor, a herald from afar, a daystar announcing the sunrise, of Congreve's matchless and inimitable Sir Wilfrid Witwould. But in Congreve's time, and even in Crowne's, the construction of a play—its carpentry, to use a French term beloved of the great Dumas—was too well understood for it to have been possible that a writer of brilliant ability and conscientious energy should have offered to the public a play so roughly put together—so loose on its hinges and so shaky in its joints. 'It is no common play,' says a friend of the author in a remarkably well-written copy of commendatory verses ;

Nor is thy labyrinth [? so] confused but we  
In that disorder may proportion see.



That is, I should be inclined to add, on a second reading. The actual audience of that ideal time for dramatists and poets must have been as quick to seize the clue and follow the evolution of the most complicated plot or combination of plot with underplot or counterplot as to catch and relish the finer graces of poetry, the rarer beauties of style, the subtler excellences of expression. The influence of Jonson is here still patent and palpable enough ; but the incomposite composition of so vigorous and humorous a piece of work will recall to the mind of a critical reader, not the faultless evolution of such a flawless masterpiece as *The Alchemist*, but the disjointed and dislocated elaboration of so magnificent a failure—if failure we may diffidently venture to call it—as *The Devil is an Ass*. It is surely a very bad fault for either a dramatist or a novelist to cram into the scheme of a story, or to crowd into the structure of a play, too much bewildering ingenuity of incident or too much confusing presentation of character : but such a fault is possible only to a writer of real if not high ability.

*A Mad Couple well Matched* is very clever, very coarse, and rather worse than dubious in the bias of its morality ; but there is no fault to be found with the writing or the movement of the play ; both style and action are vivid and effective throughout. That ‘ a new language and quite a new turn of comic interest came in with the Restoration ’ will hardly be allowed by the readers of such plays as this. That well-known and plausible observation is typical of a stage in his studies when Lamb was apparently if not evidently unversed in such reading as may be said to cast over the gap between Etherege and Fletcher a bridge on which Shirley may shake hands with Shadwell, and Wycherley with Brome. A more brutal blackguard,

more shameless ruffian, than the leading young gentleman of this comedy will hardly be found on the stage of the next theatrical generation. Variety of satirical observation and fertility of comic invention, with such vigorous dialogue and such strong sound English as might be expected from a disciple of his master's, give to this as to others of Brome's comedies a quality which may fairly and without flattery be called Jonsonian; and one of the minor characters is less a reminiscence of Juliet's nurse than an anticipation of Miss Hoyden's. No higher praise could be given, as no higher could be deserved.

The prologue to *The Novella* is really worthy of Dryden: its Jonsonian self-confidence and defiance are tempered by a certain grace and dexterity of expression which recalls the style and the manner of the later rather than the earlier laureate. In this brilliant and audacious comedy the influence of Ben Jonson's genius and example is exceptionally perceptible and exceptionally happy; for here it is the author of *Volpone*, not the author of *Bartholomew Fair*, who has inspired and guided the emulous ability of his servant. The metre and style are models of comic language and versification; the action, if a little complicated and more than a little improbable, is as lively as in any of Fletcher's rather than of Jonson's comedies. The plot is as usual a little too exacting in its demands on the attention of reader or spectator; there is not quite sufficient distinctness of outline in the various figures of seniors and juniors, pantaloons and harlequins, Gérontes and Léandres, to make it at first sight as amusingly easy as it should be to follow their various fortunes through so many rather diverting than edifying evolutions and complications; but, daring even to the verge of impudence as is the central conception

of the subject, the tone or atmosphere of this Venetian comedy is less greasy than that of the author's London studies in vicious or dubious lines of life ; a fresh point in common, I need hardly observe, between the disciple and his master.

In *The Court Beggar* and *The City Wit*, twin comedies of coarse-grained humour and complicated intrigue, we breathe again the grimier air of Cockney trickery and Cockney debauchery ; but the satire on ' projectors ' or speculators in monopoly is even now as amusing as it is creditable to the author to have seconded in his humbler fashion the noble satirical enterprise of Massinger and Ben Jonson against the most pernicious abuses of their time. The three wits of the court, the country, and the city are good strong sketches in caricature ; and there are passages of such admirable eloquence in such excellent verse of the higher or graver comic style as would not have misbeseemed the hand of Jonson himself. The opening scene, for instance, in which the heroine remonstrates with her father for exchanging the happy and honoured life of a hospitable and charitable country gentleman for the mean and improvident existence of an intriguing parasite, is as fine an example of earnest or serious comedy as may be found in Shirley at his best : and the scene in the second act between the grave and eloquent dotard Sir Raphael and the unmercifully ingenious Lady Strangelove is even a better because a more humorous piece of high comic work ; so good, indeed, that in its kind it could hardly be bettered. But *The City Wit* is the finer and shapelier comedy of the two ; well conceived, well constructed, and well sustained. The conception, if somewhat farcically extravagant in outline, is most happily and ingeniously worked out ; and the process or progress of the comic

action is less broken, less intermittent, more workman-like and easier to follow, than in most if not in all of the author's preceding plays. Even where the comic types are far enough from original, there is something original and happy in the treatment and combination of their active or passive humours.

*The Damselle*, a spirited and well-written comedy, is so inferior in tone and composition as to suggest a reversion on the author's part to the cruder and coarser effects or attempts of his dramatic nonage. Justice Bumpsey is one of Brome's very best and most original creations—so fresh, and so genuine a sample of comic or farcical invention that Jonson might have applauded it with less extravagance or perversion of generosity than his cordial kindliness of nature led him sometimes to indulge in. There are passages and scenes of genuine eloquence and of pathetic sincerity in this rough and wayward piece of dramatic composition or incomposition; but the presentation of the plot or plots is as clumsy and confusing as their evolution is awkward and confused; and the noisome villainy of a character at first presented as a possible object of sympathy, and finally as a repentant and redeemed transgressor, might have made Wycherley himself—or any one but Wycherley—recoil. But there is no sign of decadence in literary ability or inventive humour; indeed, if I mistake not, two or three better comedies than this might have been carved out of the material here compressed and contorted into the mould of one. In the first scene of the second act a dramatic and effective touch of satire will remind the reader of Mr. Pickwick's horror and Mr. Perker's protest against his horror at the existence—in his day as in Brome's—of witnesses whose oaths were as readily on hire as the principles of a disunionist poli-

tician—or, if the phrase be preferred, of a separatist statesman.

*The Queen's Exchange* is one of the last examples of its kind ; a survival from the old school of plays founded on episodes of imaginary history and built up with incidents of adventurous romance ; active in invention and agile in movement, unambitious in style, and not unamusing in result. The clowneries and the villainies, the confusions and the conversions of character and fortune, seem curiously archaic or old-fashioned for the date of this belated tragicomedy ; but to lovers of the better sort of drama it will be none the less acceptable or tolerable on that account.

One of the most fanciful and delightful farces in the world is *The Antipodes*. In this charming and fantastic play a touch of poetic humour, a savour of poetic style, transfigures and exalts wild farce to the level of high comedy. The prologue to this, one of his latest comedies, is as remarkable for its exceptional quality of style as is the admirable dedication of his earliest, *The Northern Lass*. After a satirical apology for his inability to compete with the fashionable writers of plays

that carry state

In scene magnificent and language high  
And clothes worth all the rest, except the action,

he reminds his audience that

Low and home-bred subjects have their use  
As well as those fetched from on high or far ;  
And 'tis as hard a labour for the Muse  
To move the earth, as to dislodge a star.

Had these two last lines been Dryden's, they would have been famous. And had the play thus introduced been Jonson's, it must have taken high rank in the



second if not in the first class of his works as a successful comedy of humours. Joylesse and his wife, with the 'fantastic' Lord Letoy, are faithful but not servile studies after the manner of the master, who had been dead but a year when it came out, and as we learn from the author's postscript was generally applauded. The small part of the curate or chaplain Quailpipe might have been of service to Macaulay in a famous chapter of his history as an example of the humble if not contemptible position occupied in great households by men of his cloth or calling.

If Shirley may be described as a bridge between Fletcher and Etherege, Brome may be defined as a link between Jonson and Wycherley. But if some of his stage effects are crude enough in their audacity of presentation and suggestion to anticipate the tone and manner of the theatre under Charles II., the upshot of such a play as this pays at least a conventional deference to the proprieties and moralities. Virtue—of a kind—presides over the solution of a tangled and crowded intrigue, which might perhaps have gained rather than lost in clearness or vivacity of impression and effect by a little more reserve in the exercise or reticence in the display of ingenuity and invention. Perplexity and surprise ought hardly to be the mainsprings of comic art as displayed either in the evolution of intrigue or in the development of character. But no such fault, and indeed no fault of any kind, can be found with the play within this play. Even on a third or fourth reading it is impossible for even a solitary reader to reopen it at almost any part without an irresistible impulse to laugh—not to smile approval or appreciation, but to laugh out aloud and uncontrollably. The logic of the burlesque, its topsyturvy coherence, its preposterous harmony, its incon-

gruous congruity of contradictions, is as perfect as its exuberance of spontaneous and various fertility in fancy and in fun is inexhaustible and superb. The delicious inversion of all social or natural relations between husband and wife, mistress and servant, father and son, poet and puritan, lawyer and client, courtiers and clowns, might satisfy the most exacting socialist ; and the projects for the relief, encouragement, and support of criminals and scoundrels in general at the expense of the State could hardly be held unworthy of consideration by the latest and loudest apostles of professional philanthropy. Something of Jonson's influence is still perceptible in the conception and construction of this play ; but in joyous ease and spontaneity of comic imagination and expression the disciple has excelled his master.

*The English Moor, or The Mock Marriage*, is an ingenious and audacious comedy of ill-contrived and ill-combined intrigue, at once amusing and confusing, which might have been better than it is if both characters and incidents had been fewer, but more neatly and lucidly developed and arranged ; rich in good suggestions and good possibilities, but imperfect in evolution and insufficient in impression through overmuch crowding and cramping of the various figures and the complicated action. *The Love-sick Court* is such an example of unromantic romance and unimaginative invention as too often wearies and disappoints the student of English drama in its first period of decadence ; yet even in the decadence of the greatest and most various school of tragic and of comic poetry that ever this country or this world has witnessed there are signs of life and survivals of style which give to all but its very meanest examples a touch of comparative interest and a tone of comparative distinction.

In *The Covent Garden Weeded* the studious though not servile imitation of Ben Jonson is obvious enough to explain though not to justify the sneer of Randolph at the taste of the audiences who were more contented with what Brome swept from his master than with the worst leavings and the flattest dregs of that master's exhausted genius and decrepit industry. This clever and ingenious comedy is evidently built more or less on the lines of Jonson's most realistic and gigantic farce: and the obligation is no less directly than honourably acknowledged by Brome at the very opening of the very first scene, where Justice Cock-brain, 'the Weeder of the Garden,' cites with all due accuracy, as well as all due respect, the authority of his reverend ancestor Justice Adam Overdo. It cannot, of course, bear comparison with that huge and unlovely though wonderful and memorable masterpiece; but it is easier in movement and lighter in handling of humours and events.

*The New Academy, or The New Exchange*, is a tangled and huddled comedy of unattractive and improbable intrigue, not unrelieved by glimpses of interest and touches of humour; worth reading once as a study of manners and language,<sup>1</sup> but hardly worth tracing out and unravelling through all the incoherent complications and tedious convolutions of its misshapen and misconstructed plot. The romantic tragicomedy of *The Queen and Concubine* is a rather pallid study in the school of Fletcher, with touches of Jonsonian farce and more than Jonsonian iteration of cheap humours and catchpenny catchwords: but it is not unamusing in its vehement exaggeration of wickedness and goodness, of improbable impulse and impossible reaction;

<sup>1</sup> I have not met elsewhere with the quaint verb 'to snook' ('over my wife at home,' says 'an uxorious citizen').

and there is still a certain lingering fragrance—the French word *relent* would perhaps express it better—of faint and fading poetry in the tone of style and turn of phrase, which no later playwright could regain or reproduce.

The best of all Brome's plays is curiously enough the only one that has attained any posthumous popularity or any durable celebrity. It has nothing of such brilliant, spontaneous, and creative humour as flashes and vibrates through every scene of *The Antipodes*; nothing of such eccentric, romantic, and audacious originality as modesty must blush to recognise and weep to acknowledge in *The Novella*; but for sustained interest and coherent composition of quaint, extravagant, and consistent characters with fresh, humorous, and plausible results, for harmony of dramatic evolution and vivacity of theatrical event, I doubt whether it could be matched, and I am certain that it could not be excelled, outside the range of Shakespeare's comedies and farces. The infusion of romantic interest and serious poetry in *Beggar's Bush* may give to Fletcher's admirable tragicomedy a higher literary place on the roll of the English drama; but the superiority of the minor poet as a dramatic artist, and not merely as a theatrical craftsman, is patent and palpable beyond discussion or dispute.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The text of Brome's plays, which, though reprinted with all their imperfections on their heads, have never yet been edited, might supply the English dictionary with several rare and noticeable words. In *The City Wit* a short dramatic entertainment or interlude is announced as a 'ballet.' In *A Jovial Crew* we find the word 'gentile' (once used, and afterwards cancelled, by Ben Jonson): 'Provided your deportment be gentile' (a verse but too suggestive of Mr. Turveydrop and the Prince Regent); 'gentily' or 'gentilely': 'They live very civilly and gentily among us'—Act i. Scene 1; 'remore' as a verb: 'Should that remore us'—same scene; 'rakeshame,' a curious variant or synonym of 'rakehell': 'It had been good to have apprehended the Rakeshame'—Act iii. Scene 1. 'Skise,'

In the dramatic literature of any country but ours the name of Richard Brome would be eminent and famous: being but an Englishman, he is naturally regarded by critics and historians after the order of Hallam as too ineffably inferior for mention or comparison with such celebrities as Regnard or Goldoni. That such a character as Justice Clack is worthy of Molière in his broader and happier moods of humour could hardly seem questionable even to the dullest of such dullards if his creator had but 'taken the trouble to be born' in France, in Italy, or in any country but their own. As it is, I cannot suppose it possible that English readers will ever give him a place beside the least of those inferior humorists who had the good fortune or the good sense to be born outside the borders of England.

apparently a variant of the Shakespearean word 'skirr': 'Skise out this away, and skise out that away'—Act iv. Scene 1; 'yawdes' for jades: 'Your yawdes may take cold, and never be good after it'—same scene. In the first scene of the second act there is a curious mention of Bath, and of Captain Dover's games on the glorious Cotswold Hills: 'We are not for London.' 'What think you of the Bath then?' 'Worse than t'other way. I love not to carry my Health where others drop their Diseases. There's no sport i' that.' 'Will you up to the hill-top of sports, then, and Merri-ments, *Dover's Olimpicks* or the *Cotswold Games*?' 'No, that will be too publique for our Recreation.'



## JAMES SHIRLEY

IF ever the time-honoured French fashion of republishing the select works of an author in place of a complete edition might reasonably find favour in the eyes of an English student, it certainly might in the case of Shirley. A considerable section or division of the six goodly volumes which contain the first collection ever made of his multitudinous works is taken up by such vapid and colourless sketches, such mere shadows or phantoms of invertebrate and bloodless fancy, as leave no trace behind on the memory but a sense of tedious vanity and unprofitable promptitude of apparently copious but actually sterile invention. Very possibly he never wrote anything quite so bad, so insolently faulty, and so impudently preposterous, as the very worst improvisations of his master Fletcher ; but even such otherwise unqualified rubbish as *The Sea Voyage* or *The Nice Valour* has the one qualifying merit, the one extenuating circumstance, of being readable—not without irritation, indignation, and astonishment, but at all events without stupefying fatigue and insuperable somnolence.

Too many of Shirley's plays may be read or skimmed without exciting any more active or stimulating emotions than these. Royal Masters, Duke's Mistresses, Constant Maids, Young Admirals, Balls, Coronations, and Humorous Courtiers pass before the reader's half-closed eyes in a long thin stream of indistinguishable figures and immemorable events. They never, as far as he can observe or can remember, sink below a

certain modest level of passable craftsmanship and humble merit ; but they never rise into palpable distinction or cohere into substantial form. The worst that can be said of them is not that they are wanting in merits or abounding in faults, but that they do not exist ; they have absolutely no principle of life, no reason for being, no germ of vitality whatever. It would be something if even they were bad ; it would be something if even they were dull ; but they are not bad, they are nothing ; they are not dull, they are null. You read them, and feel next day as if you had read nothing. The leading articles of last week's journals have left as much mark on your memory, as much impression on your mind. Perhaps you can hardly tell—they may be rather good of their kind than bad ; but their kind has no right to propagate, no reason to produce. Once or twice the writer may remind you of Jonson—with all the sap squeezed out of him, or of Fletcher—with all his grace evaporated ; but as a rule they are simply wearisome and conventional, anæmic and invertebrate. Even those who loathe the Puritans with a loathing equal to that of Butler may admit, as one at least of their number is ready to do, that if the advent of those brainless and brutish devil-worshippers had cut off nothing better worth keeping than the average of Shirley's supply for the London stage, literature and art and poetry would have had no very heavy charge to bring against their deadliest and most desperate enemies.

On the other hand, it would be unjust to undervalue the merit of the work which seventy years since found its first articulate admirer in Campbell, and has lately found a no less cordial than capable advocate in Mr. Gosse. Nor will any one deny the claim of Shirley to the neutral credit of such negative commen-

dation as may be due to a writer alike incapable of the faults and of the excellences which distinguish or disfigure the work of greater men. In Defoe's phrase, 'he can't commit their crimes; it would task a stronger genius than his to do so.' But then the question with regard to a poet's claims is not a question of abstinence, but of achievement; he must be judged by consideration of what he has accomplished, not of what he has avoided. Virtue which depends on incompetence to sin can hardly be commended for withstanding temptation. 'J'admire Scipion, soit,' says Victor Hugo; 'j'admire moins Origène.'

Abstinence, however, is not Shirley's only virtue; if it were, he would now be sleeping with Tate and Home, Cumberland and Jephson, Talfourd and Sheridan Knowles. There are very remarkable and admirable exceptions to the general mediocrity of his level, conventional, unambitious, and languid work. The terrible sarcasm which lashed him into oblivion for a century and a half may possibly, if not justifiably, have been provoked by the revival of his first play, a year after the author's death; a resurrection which may not unnaturally have been regarded by Dryden—it must assuredly be regarded by modern students—as an example of the survival of the unfittest. That *Love Tricks, or The School of Complement* (in modern English, of accomplishments) should have been reissued on the stage forty-two years after its first appearance is so unaccountable a fact that it may be allowed to account for the contempt with which the Laureate of the Restoration referred to the memory of Shirley fifteen years later.

This first attempt of its author is a feebly preposterous and impotently imitative abortion, and the product of second-hand humour and second-rate

sentiment : but though always absurd it is not always dull ; there are one or two redeeming touches which indicate or suggest a latent or dormant capacity for better things. There is a pleasant anticipation of modern progress on the social lines of French democracy in the first scene, when an amorous elder on the eve of marriage reflects and resolves thus manfully : ‘ I will get but one child, and that shall be a boy, lest having too many children I undo my heir, and my goods be divided.’ That a royalist playwright of retrogressive and reactionary England should thus early have foreseen and forecast the future of ‘ the great nation,’ under the practical and exemplary influence of the most advanced and enlightened children of its unspeakably sublime revolution, may perhaps be no less edifying than amusing to readers not inoculated with incurable Gallomania.

The absurd fancy of representing an old man under the delusion that his youth had been restored to him can only be excelled in preposterous and irritating inanity of impotent invention by the ineffable notion of introducing a young libertine, in the heyday of impudent vigour and rampant recklessness, whom a virtuous young woman, assisted by acquaintances of such virtue as will ignore blows and kicks administered by the subject of the experiment, succeeds in persuading that he is dead. How such impudent and insufferable nonsense can ever have crawled on to the stage or crept into print it is difficult to understand. *The Witty Fair One* is woefully witless stuff—inane, incoherent, incomposite, impossible, and dull. A pretty piece of smooth and smirking verse, which might have passed unobserved among far nobler passages in almost any play of Dekker’s or Middleton’s or Marston’s, attracted the attention of a critic who did not think

overmuch of Shakespeare to a somewhat vapid and flaccid play of Shirley's. I doubt if the reader whom this quotation may induce or impel to peruse *The Brothers* will bless the memory of the critic who suggested such an enterprise. 'They did not think,' says one of the actors in the last scene, 'to find this pale society of ghosts'; which shows that he had not had time to keep company with his fellow phantoms, the other and latter ghosts of their romantic or sentimental invention. A paler or more featureless 'society' it would be difficult to find.

But when Shirley was not astray on the track of his adored Fletcher, limping and wheezing and hobbling behind that splendid if not always reliable racer, he could run better than might have been expected by a spectator of his performances in a field reserved for steeds of finer blood and higher mettle. I can by no means agree with Mr. Dyce that the happiest efforts of his genius will perhaps be found in the tragic portions of these variegated dramas, his romantic or tragicomic studies in the school of Fletcher rather than Beaumont. Such a tragedy as *The Traitor*, such a comedy as *The Example*, may defy comparison with the best of these hybrid and imitative creatures of overworked invention and fatigued or enfeebled fancy. Even *The Maid's Revenge*, for which his very editors have hardly a good word, is a failure which makes us feel that it ought to have been a success; crude, rude, coarse, and rough as it is, there is more suggestion if not more presentation of natural passion and dramatic life in it than in a later play, so much better polished and composed, so much more equable and elaborate, as *The Cardinal*. But the fiendish atrocity of Catalina is a flight beyond the gentle capacity of Shirley: his pinion flags in the attempt, and his voice cracks in the



effort to express such murderous and perfidious passions. A very fine tragedy might have been made out of the story : but when we think what Middleton and Rowley would have given us, had they happily chanced to undertake it, we cannot be thankful enough that the story of Beatrice and De Fleres fell into the right hands, and was treated by artists who could make at once the most and the best of it, as they would have made, and Shirley could not make, of the story of Antonio and Berinthia.

In *The Brothers*, his next play, Shirley now and then touches a note of feeling and expression more natural and more graceful, more proper and peculiar to his talent. The subject, in stronger hands, might have been the groundwork of a very noble play ; in Shirley's it is but faintly attempted and inadequately carried out, with nothing like the vigour and vitality of Mr. Norris's admirable story, *Major and Minor*. One scene, however, is worthy of Fletcher : that master of tender fancy and romantic emotion might well have approved and enjoyed so charming a study in his school of art as the interview between the disinherited lover and the girl who would share his fallen fortunes, but finds him unwilling—too loyal and unselfish, or too diffident and half-hearted—to prove unkind, and marry her. That the woman's part is finer than the man's is typical of the author's somewhat feminine if not effeminate genius. He looks on vice and virtue, prosperity and adversity, action and passion, in the spirit of an amiable woman whose instincts are innocent and domestic, but whose literary ambition is apt to tempt her into unseemly affectation of a man's unconscious tone, and indecorous imitation of his natural manner. He tries now and then to play Tom Jones, but his heart is with Sir Charles Grandison.

His passion, at its highest and keenest, is never anything more than intensified sentiment. Even in *The Witty Fair One*, gross and monstrous in its coarseness and absurdity as is the more original and rememberable portion of the plot, there are touches of liveliness and ingenuity ; such as the amusing if rather easy and trivial device of the letter returned by a mistake which brings about one or two fairly effective scenes : but even this better part is not vigorously or thoroughly conceived and carried out. The best thing in the play, the ingenious device by which Violetta discovers her regard and gains herself a lover, is borrowed—and certainly not heightened or bettered in the borrowing—from Marston's *Dulcimet* in *The Fawn*. One excellent touch of humour and good sense in this abortive comedy bears evidence to the unchanged and unchangeable absurdity of affectation which will probably always distinguish a fool whelped in England from a fool whelped in any other country. 'What say you to England?' asks a simple young fellow who has just been desired to name what kingdom or province he has most mind to travel in. 'By no means,' replies the tutor who has undertaken to imbue him with the principles of culture ; 'it is not in fashion with gentlemen to study their own nation ; you will discover a dull easiness if you admire not, and with admiration prefer not, the weeds of other regions before the most pleasant flowers of your own garden.' The most 'cultured' Oxonicule of the present day could have said no better and no more.

The fifth of Shirley's plays is his first really good one : and *The Wedding* is a tragicomedy which would have done no discredit to an older and more famous poet. Fletcher, who had been dead four years when it first appeared in print, has left us much worse as

well as much better work than this. The first and central incident of the action may or may not have been borrowed from an earlier play that Field had published, a comedy, twenty-seven years before, in which the bridal of an innocent girl was broken off by the intervention of a slanderer and the defamation of her chastity. The effect is less striking from a theatrical point of view in Shirley's play than in Field's ; but the incident is at once more credible and more explicable. The slanderer in Field's play is a rather theatrical villain—an improbable compound of Pistol and Iachimo : the motive which impels the unconscious calumniator in Shirley's is honest and friendly. And in composition and execution this play is so far ahead of any previous work from the same hand that the first audience or the first reader might well have been inclined to question the authenticity of its ascription to the author of Shirley's previous plays. The farcical underplot is not very refined or very subtle, but not less amusing than Massinger's or Fletcher's rougher work on the same or a similar line : and the construction would be almost blameless if the conduct of the disguised girl on whose perfidy the whole plot hinges had been more rational and less theatrical. The eternal 'she-page' who pesters and infests the plays of the period is a more positive nuisance in Shirley's than even in Massinger's. The Viola-Cesario of Shakespeare's invention, the Bellario-Euphrasia of Beaumont's or Fletcher's, must regretfully be held responsible for numberless idiocies of imitation. In the hands of Ford or Dekker this common type of deformed devotion becomes too tragic and pathetic to fall under the same reprobation as the tricks and shifts of these more conventional playwrights. Poor Winnifrede in *The Witch of*

*Edmonton* is a more touching and lifelike figure than the jaded invention of such imitative dealers in sentiment or sensation could evoke.

It is amusing to find in the next work of so fervent a royalist as Shirley so sharp a stroke of satire aimed at his fellows of the court as might have been dealt by a writer of the opposite party at the conspirators against the constitution who were soon to succeed in plunging their country into civil war and bringing their leader to the scaffold. 'I shall quickly learn to forget myself,' says 'a foolish ambitious steward' in the tragicomedy of *The Grateful Servant*, 'when I am great in office; I will oppress the subject, flatter the prince, take bribes on both sides, do right to neither, serve heaven as far as my profit will give me leave, and tremble only at the summons of a parliament.' Charles I. had been six months on the throne when this comedy was licensed. Like the great majority of Shirley's plays, it is 'too bad for a blessing, too good for a curse': and the reader will not improbably 'wish from his soul it were better or worse.' There is no lack of pretty flowery writing in it, which seems to have taken the fancy of Campbell more than the more serious merit of its author's better plays; but there is not much else. Conventional motives and fantastic impulses take the place of noble passions and natural emotions; the curious mixture or alternation of shameless and unnatural brutality in the villainous libertine of the play with the most refined and rose-coloured devotion in its sentimental heroine is not only significant but typical of the decadence from the age of Shakespeare and Webster which found its fittest and its fairest representatives in Davenport and Shirley. That the inevitable 'she-page' was not yet unacceptable to an overtolerant audience is no less evident than



inexplicable. The fantastic unreason of Spanish chivalry and the fantastic perversity of English sentimentalism have seldom been exemplified in a more ludicrously serious manner than by a lover's offer to cede his mistress to his sovereign out of regard for her ('I love her still, and in that study her advancement!') and by the author's evident belief that this monstrous prostitution of sentimental servility is (in his own words) a 'miracle of honour, and of love.' It is enough to make one think that the court whose fashionable sentiment found its prophet or exponent in Shirley—the court of Henrietta Maria—might have been the court of Blanche Amory, the immortal young lady who had always on hand a whole stock of sham or second-hand emotions.

Two years after the appearance of this pretty but uninteresting sample of sentimental and ineffectual invention, the one play which gives its author a place among the tragic poets of Shakespeare's age and country was licensed for the stage, and found its way into print four years afterwards. The gravest error or defect of Shirley's work as a dramatist is usually perceptible in the management of his underplots; his hand was neither strong enough to weld nor skilful enough to weave them into unity or harmony with the main action; and the concurrent or alternate interests, through lack of coherence and fusion, become a source of mere worry and weariness to the distracted attention and the jaded memory. But the main plot of *The Traitor*, founded on the assassination or immolation of Alessandro de' Medici by his kinsman Lorenzino (whom Shirley—and for that matter Musset and Dumas—probably did not know to have been a brother dramatist), is very neatly and happily interwoven with a story which at first sight recalls that of



the fatal marriage and breach of promise through which the name of Buondelmonti had attained a significance so tragical for Florence three hundred and twenty-two years earlier. This underplot, however, is more probably a device of the author's or an adaptation from some serviceable 'novel' or romance than a distorted reflection of so remote an actual tragedy.

The unreal unselfishness of unnatural devotion and the sentimental vehemence of moral paradox, which mark the decline of English tragedy from the level of Shakespeare's more immediate followers, are flagrant in the folly of such a conception as this of a lover who insists on resigning his mistress against her will to a friend already betrothed or pledged in honour to another woman. Chivalry has destroyed itself—plucked out its own eyes, and cut its own throat—when it descends to such heartless and senseless depths of sentimental superstition. But it must be allowed that this perverse and preposterous improbability is skilfully and delicately adapted to bring into fuller relief the most beautiful figure on all the overcrowded stage of Shirley's invention. His place among our poets would be very much higher than it is if he could have left us but one or two others as thoroughly realised and as attractively presented as the noble and pathetic conception of Amidea. There is something in the part which reminds us of Beaumont's Aspatia; but even though the forsaken heroine of the elder poet has yet more exquisite poetry to utter than any that Shirley could produce, her character is less noble and attractive, the manner of her death is less natural and far less touching. The lover in either case is equally contemptible; but the heroic part of Sciarrha is as superior in truthfulness as it was inferior in popularity

to the famous but histrionic part of the boastful martialist Melantius. The King in *The Maid's Tragedy* is certainly not better drawn than his equally licentious but less tyrannous counterpart in *The Traitor*; and the very effective scene in which Calianax denounces Melantius to the King, only to be stormed down and put to silence by the denial of his accomplice and the laughing incredulity of the victim, is surpassed by the admirable device in which the chief conspirator's superb and subtle audacity of resource confounds the loyalty of Sciarrha and confirms the confidence of Alessandro. A more ingenious, natural, and striking situation—admirable in itself, and more admirable in its introduction and its assistance to the progress or evolution of the plot—it would be difficult to find in any play. The swiftness and sharpness of suspicious intuition, the promptitude and impudence of intelligent hypocrisy, which distinguish the conduct of Shirley's ideal conspirator, are far above the level of his usual studies or sketches of the same or a similar kind. Nor is there, if I mistake not, so much of really beautiful writing, of pure and vigorous style, of powerful and pathetic simplicity, in any earlier or later work of its author. Of Shakespeare or of Marlowe or of Webster we can hardly hope to be reminded while reading Shirley: but we are reminded of Fletcher at his best by the cry of sympathy with which Amidea receives the assurance that the rival who has unwittingly and reluctantly supplanted her is also the victim of her lover's infidelity and ingratitude.

Alas, poor maid !  
We two keep sorrow alive then.

This indeed, if I may venture to say so, seems to me a touch not unworthy of Webster himself—the nearest

of all our poets to Shakespeare in command of spontaneous and concentrated expression for tragic and pathetic emotion.

It is somewhat singular that Shirley's next play, a severely moral if audaciously realistic tragedy of illicit passion, should have found favour on the stage of the Restoration. Its tone is certainly so unlike that of *The Kind Keeper* or *The Country Wife* that its toleration by the patrons of Wycherley and of Dryden is hard to explain—except perhaps by the sisterly sympathy which may have been awakened in the various foundresses of ducal houses for the doings and sufferings of so impudent a strumpet as its heroine. The advance in experience or intelligence of such characters which distinguishes *Love's Cruelty* from *The Maid's Revenge* must be unmistakable by the most innocent reader; the perfidious and poisonous Catalina is a violent and boyish caricature, the lascivious and murderous Clariana is a real and unmerciful portrait. The development of her character from mere wayward and capricious curiosity of coquettish irritation into lecherous and irreclaimable ferocity of jealous egotism is at least as well conceived and executed as any other study from the same hand. Her soft-hearted but high-minded husband, her penitent young lover and his profligate old father, are more solid and vivid figures than their easy-going creator could usually present: and it is singular that Macaulay should so completely have overlooked or forgotten the point of the catastrophe as to cite this play as an instance in which 'the outraged honour of families is repaired by a bloody revenge.' No two catastrophes could well be more widely dissimilar than this one and that of *The Fatal Dowry*: the only point they have in common is that in each case an adulteress dies by a violent death. In

the one case, a penitent woman is executed by the unrelenting justice of an inflexible husband : in the other, an impenitent woman assassinates her paramour, and is slaughtered by him in return ; a comfortable consummation which surely carries with it no particular reference to outraged honour.

The comedy which bears the pretty title of *Changes, or Love in a Maze*, has some pretty passages and scenes, but it is far too 'high fantastical' for any serious interest in the action or the agents to be possible : and there is unpleasant evidence in one place that no amount of noble or royal patronage could make a gentleman at heart of the playwright who was capable of representing as other than the vilest of all villains and the meanest of all hounds a wretch who by way of excuse for his own rascality would support or encourage a suggestion against the character and honour of a lady whom he has deserted for a wealthier object of courtship. On the other hand, the noble unselfishness of the hopeless lover who is ready to serve her at the cost of his own happiness is painted with so fine and warm a sympathy as almost to renew our better opinion of the poet. But except for the ingenuity of intrigue, which from a theatrical point of view is really creditable, and really amusing in the upshot, it is too slight a thing to deserve any very serious praise, as it is altogether too slight a thing to deserve any serious blame. *The Bird in a Cage* is a play of much the same weight : not ill done, if not particularly worth doing ; with farcical passages which may be found fairly diverting by idle or indulgent readers, and a pretty touch of humanity in advance of an age little inclined to such tenderness for animals as moves the imprisoned princess to set free her captive birds.

The bright light comedy of *Hyde Park* is the second

really good play of its kind on the long list of Shirley's works. In vigour of style and force of interest it is notably inferior to *The Wedding* : its tone is altogether more modern, more remote from tragicomedy, less serious and less ambitious ; but it belongs unmistakably to a period of transition. It is a quasi-poetic or semi-poetic piece of work, and so far belongs or aims at belonging to the same class as *The Spanish Curate* or *The Guardian*—not to say as *Twelfth Night* or *Much Ado about Nothing*. It aims also at a transient sort of realism, a photographic representation of the fancies or the follies of the hour, its passing affectations or extravagances of the drawing-room or the race-course, which anticipates in some degree the enterprise, if not the superb and perfect mastery in that line, of such artists as Congreve and Vanbrugh. The versatility and flexibility of talent required and displayed in such an attempt, admitting it to be fairly and moderately successful, may reasonably challenge our praise ; but Mistress Carol, though bright and pleasant enough, is as far beneath the level of Millamant as beneath the level of Viola. —

Between the sunset of Fletcher and the sunrise of Etherege the moonlight of Shirley's more modest and subdued genius serves well enough to display him as a successor of the poetic or romantic dramatist whose fancy walks hand in hand with humour, and a precursor of the prosaic or realistic playwright whose cynical humour has swallowed up sentiment and fancy as a stork might swallow a frog ; but this moonlit or starlit period of transition is noticeable rather for its refraction of the past than its anticipation of the coming day. The characters in such comedies as this of Shirley's seem to be playing at reality as shadows might play at being substantial, as ghosts might play



at being alive, as children do play at being 'grown-up'; and this at least is a charge which can no more be brought against the ruffians and strumpets of Wycherley's or Shadwell's invention than against the noble men or women of Shakespeare's or of Webster's. The return of the shipwrecked husband to his supposed widow is borrowed from Marston's *What you Will*; and though Shirley's comedy is far more neatly and reasonably constructed, far more satisfactory to an æsthetic or intelligent judge of composition, it has nothing of such intellectual force or such literary merit as must be recognised here and there in the rougher and more vigorous work of the elder and greater though ruder and faultier poet. Marston, with all his shortcomings, is one of Jonson's if not of Shakespeare's men-at-arms; Shirley, with all his merits, is but one of Fletcher's bodyguard.

There is some honest fun, though there is no great matter, in the little satirical comedy of *The Ball*: the sham traveller is a more original and amusing figure than a copy of Ben Jonson's rather ponderous Puntarvolo could have been; and even after all his precursors the braggart and beaten coward contrives to have some amusing and original touches of baseness and comicality about him, which may make us tolerate the reappearance of an almost worn-out and wearisome type of farce. The ladies and their lovers are so lamentably shadowy and shapeless that a modern reader has no difficulty in understanding the curious admission of the poet in a later and better and less reticent play that he had been 'bribed to a modest admission of their antic gambols.' Had he rejected the bribe, supposing it to have ever been offered, a less decorous and a less vacuous comedy might have been better worth our reading: but possibly, if not

probably, the assertion or imputation may be merely part of the character to whom it is assigned. Shirley, however, must have all due credit for this fresh stripe of satire applied to the same idiotic affectation which he had lashed with as wholesome and cordial a stroke of contempt just four years earlier, in a passage already quoted. 'You must encourage strangers, while you live ; it is the character of our nation, we are famous for dejecting our own countrymen.'

Shirley's next play, *The Young Admiral*, is amusing enough for a lazy and consequently a tolerant reader to take up and put down with as much satisfaction as he might hope to derive from a novel obviously and exclusively intended for railway reading ; it is not at all discreditable, and now and then promises—and breaks its promise—to be seriously interesting as well as tolerably entertaining ; the hero and heroine are a very creditable couple of ultimately triumphant victims, the kings and knaves, bullies and fools, play their parts very decently and endurably. On the whole, we may say of this and indeed most of Shirley's plays that it admirably anticipates and agreeably realises Mrs. John Knightley's immortal receipt for ' nice smooth gruel—thin, but not too thin.'

The one thing memorable about this anæmic and invertebrate play is the fact that it had the dishonour to be commended for its decency and propriety by the mean puritan who then dishonoured even the discreditable post of dramatic censor. A censor of a far different kind has made of Shirley's next play the central point of his impeachment, the crowning witness in favour of his plea for puritans against playwrights, for William Prynne against William Shakespeare. A better point could not have been made ; a better witness could not have been cited.

It would be worse than useless for a lover of poetry and a hater of puritanism to undertake the defence of the admirably constructed and excellently written tragicomedy which Charles I. set Shirley to write on a subject supplied by the royal and kindly patron. The subject is excellent in its way, and suggestive of even better and stronger dramatic effects than Shirley has made out of it ; but the utter vileness, the abject and atrocious treachery of the two mean tricksters and traffickers in women who play the leading parts in this comedy, cannot reasonably be condoned on consideration of the brilliant and striking situations which are brought about by the villainy of these gilded and varnished rascals. Fletcher was not a severe moralist ; he is usually considered by modern critics to have sometimes broken the bounds of good taste and artistic tact in his pictures of headlong youth and light-hearted passion : but not one of his Rubilios, Valentines, or Pinieros, can be imagined capable of such baseness as would disgrace a professional pander. *The Gamester* is a very clever, very powerful, and very amusing play : but Wycherley's *Plain Dealer*, though doubtless more impudent in its indecency, is certainly less immoral in its consummation. Fletcher in his own way, like Congreve in his, has always at least the graceless grace of high-bred wantonness ; Shirley is nothing if not moral ; or rather he is ruffianly and repulsive.

*A Contention for Honour and Riches* is a bright and ingenious little interlude in which the author shows himself as faithful and as able an imitator of Jonson as in the costly *Triumph of Peace* which soon afterwards eclipsed all previous pageants of the kind for gorgeous extravagance of elaborate profusion. In the dramatic or literary part of this glorified puppet-show there is some very pretty, humorous, and ingenious

writing ; the final interlude of burlesque is so especially well conceived and invented that it may provoke even a modern and private reader to a quiet and approving smile. Four or five months later the best of Shirley's comedies was licensed for the stage. To have written such a tragedy as *The Traitor*, such a comedy as *The Example*, should be sufficient to secure for their author a doubly distinguished place among the poets of his country. A judgment unblinded by perversity, prepossession, or malevolence must allow that the noble tone of this poem is at least as typical of its author's tone of mind as the baser tone of a preceding play : a candid and clear-headed critic would have admitted that the moral credit due to the author of *The Example* was enough to counterbalance, if not to efface and obliterate, the moral discredit due to the author of *The Gamester*.

The noble, high-spirited, simple-hearted and single-minded heroine would suffice to sweeten and redeem an otherwise condemnable or questionable piece of work ; her husband is a figure not unworthy to be set beside her ; and the passionate young tempter whose chivalrous nature is so gracefully displayed in the headstrong, punctilious, perverse, and generous course of conduct which follows on the fact of his conversion would be as thoroughly successful and complete a study as either, if it were not for the luckless touch of incongruous melodrama which throws the lady of his love into a swoon at the sight of his preposterous poniard and the sound of his theatrical threats. But all that can be done to redeem this conventional and sensational error is admirably well done in the sequel of this noble and high-toned play ; a model of simple construction and harmonious evolution, in which the broad comedy of the underplot is rather a relief than



an encumbrance to the progress of the more serious action.

*The Opportunity* is a lighter and slighter piece of work, but as lively, ingenious, and amusing in its complications and solutions, its intrigue and its results, as any comedy of accidents and errors not glorified by the sign-manual of Plautus, Shakespeare, or Molière. The night-scene under the balcony is as dexterously contrived as the night-scene in *George Dandin*, and more plausible as well as more decorous in its arrangement and its upshot. *The Coronation* is a too characteristic example of that uninteresting ingenuity in construction and that unprofitable fertility of invention which must be allowed to distinguish the duller and emptier plays of Shirley. It opens with some promise of interest, but the promise is almost immediately falsified: the passage in the first scene, which, in Gifford's opinion, 'cannot be exceeded for truth and humour,' is the only passage in the play which deserves the attributes of 'liveliness' and 'pretty perversity'; the laboured complications and revolutions of character and event are perverse enough in their mechanical intricacy, but their liveliness and prettiness are less easy to discover. The publisher's attribution of this play to Fletcher is only exceeded in idiotic monstrosity of speculative impudence by the publisher's attribution of *The London Prodigal* to Shakespeare. And the title-page which brackets Shirley's name with Chapman's as joint author of the pathetic and stately tragedy of *Chabot* makes almost as exorbitant a demand upon our credulity.

But the comedy which was licensed six months afterwards is the most brilliant though by no means the most blameless of Shirley's plays. His gift of



graceful and humorous writing was never more happily exercised and displayed than in the glittering and shifting scenes of *The Lady of Pleasure*. In style and in versification it is equally superior to most of his other comedies: the rivalry of the two heroines in fashionable extravagance and display could hardly have been more lifelike and amusing if painted or photographed by Etherege or Congreve. But it is impossible to reconcile the morality of *Love for Love* with the morality of *A Woman killed with Kindness*: the endeavour to do so must needs result in a more revolting and unnatural violation or adulteration of morality than even the brutal and impudent genius of a Wycherley could have attempted or conceived. Charles Lamb was as absolutely and unanswerably right as usual in his contention on behalf of the great comic dramatists who flourished after the Restoration that the characters of their plays are outside the pale of moral criticism: and Macaulay, in his energetic attempt at a refutation of this plea, gave evidence of a more than Caledonian incapacity to appreciate the finer shades of critical reasoning and the subtler touches of humorous logic. Now Shirley, in this splendid and sparkling comedy of high life, has fallen into the very pit which Congreve so skilfully and Vanbrugh so nearly avoided.

A little more, or a little less, and we might say of his characters what Lamb says of Congreve's, that they do not offend our moral sense; 'in fact they do not appeal to it at all. They seem engaged in their proper element. They break through no laws, or conscientious restraints. They know of none. They have got out of Christendom into the land—what shall I call it?—of cuckoldry, the Utopia of gallantry, where pleasure is duty, and the manners perfect

freedom.' In that land the escapades of such characters as Aretina, Kickshaw, and Decoy would be simply amusing and becoming: but in this half-way house on the border which divides the generation of Massinger from the generation of Etherege they are partly diverting and partly shocking. The infusion of a little morality makes the whole affair immoral: the intrusion of a somewhat equivocal and utterly incongruous penitence reduces a comic intrigue to the level of a serious crime. 'Il est vrai,' says the great Dumas, in an admirable chapter of his delightful memoirs, 'que du temps de Molière cela s'appelait le cocuage, et qu'on en riait; que de nos jours cela s'appelle l'adultère, et qu'on en pleure.' It is so obviously impossible to reconcile or to harmonise these two points of view that the very attempt must needs be no less offensive to the intelligence of good taste than repulsive to the instinct of good feeling. With this very serious reserve, it would be difficult to overpraise a play in which the genius and the art of Shirley are seen together at their brightest and their best.

*The Royal Master* is a fair example of Shirley's ingenious and fertile talent; there is a somewhat faded and conventional grace in the style of it which seems not unsuitable to a rather slight and artificial but neither ill-conceived nor ill-conducted plot. *The Duke's Mistress* has a little more life and spirit with interest enough of story to make it a better specimen of the same class. *The Doubtful Heir* is perhaps the best; with the usual faults or conventions of romantic tragicomedy and the particular weaknesses of the author's style and manner it combines some peculiar merits of genuine grace and tenderness. There are touches in it of something more like spontaneous pathos and serious interest

than we find in most of Shirley's plays. As much may be said, though it may seem strange to say it, for his remarkable attempt at a miracle-play, revived under new conditions and adapted to maturer tastes. In the very first scene of *St. Patrick for Ireland* there is a note of truer and purer poetry than usual: the style is a little fresher, the movement more lively, and the action more amusing; and in the parts of Conallus and Emeria there are situations of real interest and touches of real pathos.

*The Constant Maid* is a comedy of some spirit and originality; but a mother's attempt to win or to test the affections of her daughter's lover is a revolting if not a ridiculous mainspring for the action of a play. A farcical character which may remind the reader of Bob Acres will only increase his appreciation of Sheridan's superior art and intelligence; though there is some crude and rough-hewn humour in Shirley's caricature of a loutish lover. But the two plots are so badly mixed that any reader or spectator would have supposed it the first attempt of an awkward and ambitious novice in comedy. The farce of *The Humorous Courtier* is not unhappily nor unamusingly conceived, but the execution is too extravagant and the infusion of serious villainy too incongruous to pass muster with the idlest or most tolerant of readers. The so-called pastoral in which Sidney's voluminous romance is condensed into dramatic form is so perfunctory in style and so halting in metre as to be worthier of a Davenant or a Killegrew than of even a second-rate or third-rate dramatic poet; but the reader who spends an hour or so on perusal of *The Arcadia* must admit that the playwright's work was neatly done—and not worth doing. How and why such a play could have been either required of any writer

or performed by any actors is a problem insoluble by the modern reader; who will find the complicated action as flat as the invertebrate versification, and will not find any shadow of serious interest or any plausible pretence to evoke it from the limbo of an obsolete popularity. Any tribute to the memory of the noble poet and hero whose literary monument is the noble poem of *Astrophel and Stella* does credit to the man who offers it; but a more singular sort of tribute than this was never paid by the most injudicious and ineffectual perversity or debility of devotion.

In *The Gentleman of Venice* the bright and lively talent of Shirley rises again after the eclipse through which it would seem to have passed. The two plots are more neatly interwoven into a more amusing and coherent story than usual: though the one may be somewhat too threadbare in its antiquity, the other somewhat too unseemly in its extravagance. But the writing throughout is graceful, easy, and pleasant to read; and the characters, if rather theatrical and rather thin, are at all events alive enough to amuse and amusing enough to satisfy a not exacting or intolerant reader. *The Politician*, if not one of Shirley's best plays, is one of his liveliest and most effective; the pathos of the scene immortalised by insertion in Lamb's immortal volume of 'Specimens' is so simple and so pure as to remind us rather of Heywood than of Shirley; and if the attempt at a similar effect in the part of an injured and misused wife is not equally happy or impressive, it is not for lack of graceful and facile writing. The worst of Shirley's tragedies is certain to be better, and very much better, than the worst of Shirley's comedies. Among these latter *The Imposture* is one of the many that will be found tolerable by the tolerant reader,

though possibly by him alone ; its complications of incident and intrigue, if (as usual) rather ingenious than interesting, relieved as they are by scenes of farcical horse-play, may serve to keep his idle attention idly awake.

If the treatment of character and passion had been equal to the development of interest and the management of the story, the vigorous and well-built tragedy of *The Cardinal* might have been what its author avowedly thought it, the flower of his flock ; it is indeed a model of composition, simple and lucid and thoroughly well sustained in its progress towards a catastrophe remarkable for tragic originality and power of invention ; with no confusion or encumbrance of episodes, no change or fluctuation of interest, no breach or defect of symmetry. But the story is more interesting than the actors ; and the points of resemblance between this play and *The Duchess of Malfy* are consequently as noticeable as the points of resemblance between Macedon and Monmouth. There is a wicked cardinal in each, and the principal victim of his crimes is an innocent duchess.

The very spirited and amusing comedy of *The Sisters* is only not one of Shirley's very best ; *The Country Captain*, discovered and reissued by Mr. Bullen, is indisputably one of them. The traditional attribution of this brilliant play to the Duke of Newcastle will hardly persuade any competent reader that it is not mainly if not altogether the work of Shirley ; though the burlesque picture of the trained bands may possibly be assigned to the professional hand of the martial and equestrian duke. The parody of Donne's most elaborately eccentric style in the verses ascribed to a fashionable poetaster seems curiously out of date in a generation of writers equally



incapable of emulating the peculiar merits and of copying the peculiar mannerisms of the great poet who is to the Cowleys and Clevelands of Shirley's day as a giant to pigmies who cannot even mimic his gait ; for the strong uneven stride of his verse is no more like the mincing amble of Cowley's than Wordsworth is like Moore. The attack on monopolists does credit to the independence and courage of the assailant ; but it is unfortunate that a figure of mere farce should so much as recall what it does not pretend to compete with, the most famous character on the stage of Massinger. The humour is throughout as much stronger as it is coarser than usual with Shirley : the more high-flown parts are more than fair examples of his fluent and flowery style of rhetoric—not glaringly artificial, but suggestive rather of perfumery than of natural perfume. Some parts of the action, like some parts of the dialogue, are exceptionally daring in the licence if not the licentiousness of their freedom ; but the upshot is more satisfactory to the moral and intellectual taste or judgment of a critical reader than is that of *The Lady of Pleasure*—the only other play of Shirley's which can be compared with it for sheer brilliance and vivacity of movement and of style.

*The Court Secret*, of apparently later date, is a thin dry cobweb of a play, with a few tender and graceful touches here and there which hardly serve to lighten or relieve the empty complications and confusions of its tedious and conventional story. But there are signs even here that the writer's invention, though now a spur-galled and broken-winded jade, was once a racer of some mettle. It is agreeable to reflect that the condensed satire of the following brief description is inapplicable to any politician of our own day :—

Why, there 's  
A statesman that can side with every faction ;  
And yet most subtly can untwist himself  
When he hath wrought the business up to danger !  
He lives within a labyrinth.

There are some ' pretty little tiny kickshaws ' among Shirley's poems. His *Good Night* is a curious anticipation of Shelley's, though less graceful and serious in expression ; but it would be flattery to honour his elegies with the qualification of mediocrity ; and his *Narcissus* must surely be the very feeblest and faintest copy among all the innumerable imitations of Shakespeare's too popular first poem. *The Triumph of Beauty* is poor meagre stuff ; the interlude of *Cupid and Death* is livelier and not ungraceful, though much beneath what it might have been. *The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses* is a very fair piece of work, more solid in versification than usual, though wanting alike in the stately grace of Ovid and the sprightly facility of Heywood ; but memorable only as containing the one universally popular and famous poem of so fertile a writer as Shirley. This celebrated dirge or monody is no doubt a noble poem, but it has also been a very lucky one. There is many a yet finer lyric of the same age and kind which has had but two or three readers where Shirley's lament has had a thousand.

His last work, the allegorical comedy of *Honorina and Mammon*, is not merely a recast or expansion of a twenty-six years older work, but a great improvement on that clever and bright little interlude. Shirley's wit, style, and humour are all at their best in the curious and ingenious drama with which he took a final farewell of the stage. It is amusing to find in his last as in his first play a touch of satire which would have been even more timely and appropriate in a satirist

of our own generation. 'I'll—build a bridge,' says one of Lady Mammon's suitors, 'from Dover cliff to Calais.' 'A drawbridge?' asks a countryman; and another observes, with due reticence,

This may be done; but I am of opinion  
We shall not live to see it.

Amen to that: but the loyal and sensible old poet is surely deserving of serious praise and credit for his contemptuously imaginative anticipation of the most monstrous project ever hatched—except perhaps its fellow-folly, a submarine instead of an aerial conspiracy against the beneficence of nature.

The works of Shirley fall naturally into three categories or classes; those in the first class are very good, those in the second class are very fair, those in the third class are very poor. *The Traitor*, *The Example*, *The Lady of Pleasure*, and *The Country Captain* belong beyond all question to the first class: *The Wedding*, *Hyde Park*, *The Gamester*, and *The Cardinal* stand high in the second. If these, with perhaps two or three more, were all we had of Shirley, it would be simply impossible to see the point or understand the meaning of Dryden's bitter sneer at his 'tautology.' But to the patient reader of all his plays the truth of the imputation will be as evident as the cruelty of the insult. The general charge of repetition, monotony, wearisome reiteration of similar types and similar effects, can hardly be disputed or denied. Of Heywood, whom Dryden in his headlong ignorance and his headstrong arrogance chose or chanced to bracket with Shirley as a subject for indiscriminate satire, this cannot either truthfully or plausibly be affirmed. He has always something to say, even though it be said in the homeliest of bald and prosy styles: Shirley at his

worst has really nothing to say whatever. But the demerits of his duller and unhappier hours would hardly be remembered by the admirers of his better work if he had never been overpraised by such critics as depreciate or ignore his betters.

The 'poet-critic' who ignores the existence of Tourneur and dismisses Webster with a sneer expatiates with exuberance of unction on the attractions and fascinations of Shirley : and this enthusiasm on the part of Campbell inclines us to remember—if ever it were possible we should forget—that a breath of Cyril Tourneur's fiery passion would suffice to blast the fairest fruits of Shirley's garden into dust and ashes, and a glance from the eye of John Webster to strike its chirping and twittering birds into breathless and cowering silence. When we turn to such poets as these we can hardly see or hear or remember Shirley as a singer or a creator at all ; but it is as unjust and ungracious to insist on the inferiority in kind which is established by such a comparison, as it would be preposterous and absurd to question it. The place of James Shirley among English poets is naturally unpretentious and modest : it is indisputably authentic and secure.





JOHN FORD

VOL. XII.

2 A



## JOHN FORD

WHENEVER the name of the poet Ford comes back to us, it comes back splendid with the light of another man's genius. The fiery panegyric of Charles Lamb is as an aureole behind it. That high-pitched note of critical and spiritual enthusiasm exalts even to disturbance our own sense of admiration ; possibly, too, even to some after injustice of reaction in the rebound of mind. Certainly, on the one hand, we see that the spirit of the critic has been kindled to excess by contact and apprehension of the poet's ; as certainly, on the other hand, we see the necessary excellence of that which could so affect and so attach the spirit of another man, and of such another man as Lamb. And the pure excess of admiration for things indeed admirable, of delight in things indeed delightful, is itself also a delightful and admirable thing when expressed to such purpose by such men.

And this poet is doubtless a man worthy of note and admiring remembrance. He stands apart among his fellows, without master or follower ; he has learnt little from Shakespeare or Marlowe, Jonson or Fletcher. The other dramatists of the great age fall naturally into classes ; thus, to take two of the greatest, Webster and Dekker both hold of Shakespeare ; *The Duchess of Malfy* has a savour of his tragedies, *Old Fortunatus* of his romantic plays ; not indeed so much by force of imitation as of affinity. These two poets were as gulfs or estuaries of the sea which is Shakespeare. In Dekker's best work we feel an air of the *Winter's Tale*

or *Midsummer Night's Dream* ; in Webster's, of *Lear* and *Othello*. Something of the April sweetness, the dew and breath of morning, which invests the pastoral and fairy world of the master, gives to the one pupil's work a not infrequent touch of delicate life and passionate grace ; from the other we catch the echoes of his oceanic harmonies of terror and pity, the refractions of that lightning which strikes into sudden sight the very depths of action and suffering, the motive forces of utter love and hate. But the poetry of Ford is no branch or arm of that illimitable sea ; it might rather be likened to a mountain lake shut in by solitary highlands, without visible outlet or inlet, seen fitlier by starlight than by sunlight ; much such an one as the Lac de Gaube above Caunterets, steel-blue and sombre, with a strange attraction for the swimmer in its cold smooth reticence and breathless calm. For nothing is more noticeable in this poet than the passionless reason and equable tone of style with which in his greatest works he treats of the deepest and most fiery passions, the quiet eye with which he searches out the darkest issues of emotion, the quiet hand with which he notes them down. At all times his verse is even and regular, accurate and composed ; never specially flexible or melodious, always admirable for precision, vigour, and purity.

The fame of Ford hangs mainly upon two great tragedies, which happily are strong enough in structure to support a durable reputation. Two others among his plays are indeed excellent, and worthy a long life of honour ; but among the mighty throng of poets then at work a leading place could hardly have been granted to the author only of *The Lover's Melancholy* and *Perkin Warbeck*. To the author of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *The Broken Heart* it cannot be refused.

It is somewhat unfortunate that the very title of Ford's masterpiece should sound so strangely in the ears of a generation 'whose ears are the chastest part about them.' For of these great twin tragedies the first-born is on the whole the greater. The subtleties and varieties of individual character do not usually lie well within the reach of Ford's handling ; but in the part of Giovanni we find more of this power than elsewhere. Here the poet has put forth all his strength ; the figure of his protagonist stands out complete and clear. There is more ease and life in it than in his other sculptures ; though here as always Ford is rather a sculptor of character than a painter. But the completeness, the consistency of design is here all the worthier of remark, that we too often find this the most needful quality for a dramatist wanting in him as in other great writers of his time.

Giovanni is the student struck blind and mad by passion ; in the uttermost depths of unimaginable crime he reflects, argues, reasons concerning the devils that possess him. In the only other tragedy of the time based on incestuous love, Massinger's *Unnatural Combat*, the criminal is old and hardened, a soul steeped and tempered in sin, a man of blood and iron from his youth upwards ; but upon Giovanni his own crime falls like a curse, sudden as lightning ; he stands before us as one plague-stricken in the prime of spiritual health, helpless under the lash of love as Canace or Myrrha, Phædra or Pasiphae. The curious interfusion of reason with passion makes him seem but the more powerless to resist, the more hopeless of recovery. His sister is perhaps less finely drawn, though her ebbs and flows of passion are given with great force, and her alternate possession by desire and terror, repentance and defiance, if we are sometimes startled by the rough



rapidity of the change, does not in effect impair the unity of character, obscure the clearness of outline. She yields more readily than her brother to the curse of Venus, with a passionate pliancy which prepares us for her subsequent prostration of mind at the feet of her confessor, and again for the revival of a fearless and shameless spirit under the stroke of her husband's violence. Nothing can be finer than the touches which bring out the likeness and unlikeness of the two ; her fluctuation and his steadfastness, her ultimate repentance and his final impenitence. The sin once committed, there is no more wavering or flinching possible to him, who has fought so hard against the dæmoniac possession ; while she who resigned body and soul to the tempter almost at a word remains liable to the influences of religion and remorse. Of all the magnificent scenes which embody their terrible story the last is (as it should be) the most noble ; it is indeed the finest scene in Ford. Even the catastrophe of *The Broken Heart*—that ' transcendent scene,' as Lamb justly called it—though more overpoweringly effective in poetic mechanism and material conception, is less profoundly and subtly impressive. In Ford's best work we are usually conscious of a studious arrangement of emotion and expression, a steady inductive process of feeling as of thought, answering to the orderly measure of the verse. That swift and fiery glance which flashes at once from all depths to all heights of the human spirit, that intuition of an indefinable and infallible instinct which at a touch makes dark things clear and brings distant things close, is not a gift of his ; perhaps Webster alone of English poets can be said to share it in some measure with Shakespeare. Bosola and Flamineo, Vittoria Corombona and the Duchess of Malfy, even

Romelio and Leonora in that disjointed and chaotic play *The Devil's Law-case*, good characters and bad alike, all have this mark upon them of their maker's swift and subtle genius ; this sudden surprise of the soul in its remoter hiding-places at its most secret work. In a few words that startle as with a blow and lighten as with a flame, the naked natural spirit is revealed, bare to the roots of life. And this power Ford also has shown here at least ; witness the passionate subtlety and truth of this passage, the deepest and keenest of his writing, as when taken with the context it will assuredly appear :—

ANNABELLA.            Be not deceived, my brother ;  
This banquet is an harbinger of death  
To you and me ; assure yourself it is,  
And be prepared to welcome it.

GIOVANNI.            Well, then :  
The schoolmen teach that all this globe of earth  
Shall be consumed to ashes in a minute.

ANN. So I have read too.

GIO.                            But 'twere somewhat strange  
To see the waters burn ; could I believe  
This might be true, I could believe as well  
There might be hell or heaven.

ANN.                            That 's most certain.

GIO. A dream, a dream ! else in this other world  
We should know one another.

ANN.                            So we shall.

GIO. Have you heard so ?

All the horror of this wonderful scene is tempered into beauty by the grace and glow of tenderness which so suffuses it as to verify the vaunt of Giovanni—

If ever after-times should hear  
Of our fast-knit affections, though perhaps  
The laws of conscience and of civil use  
May justly blame us, yet when they but know

Our loves, that love will wipe away that rigour  
Which would in other incests be abhorred.  
Give me your hand ; how sweetly life doth run  
In these well-coloured veins ! how constantly  
These palms do promise health ! but I could chide  
With nature for this cunning flattery—  
Kiss me again—forgive me.

The soft and fervent colour of Ford's style, the smooth and finished measure of his verse, never fail him throughout the nobler parts of this tragedy ; but here as elsewhere we sometimes find, instead of these, a certain hardness of tone peculiar to him. The ferocious nakedness of reciprocal invective in the scene where Soranzo discovers the pregnancy of Annabella has no parallel in the works of his great compeers. M. Taine has translated the opening passages of that scene in the division of his history of English literature which treats of our great dramatists. He has done full justice to the force and audacity of Ford's realism, which indeed he seems to rate higher than the depth and pathos, the sweet and subtle imagination, of other poets, if not than the more tender and gracious passages of Ford himself. He has dwelt, it appears to me, with especial care and favour upon three men of high genius, in all of whom this quality or this defect is conspicuous, of hardness too often deepening into brutality. A better and keener estimate of Ford, of Dryden, and of Swift can hardly be found than M. Taine's. Their vigorous and positive genius has an evident attraction for his critical spirit, which enjoys and understands the tangible and definable forces of mind, handles the hard outline, relishes the rough savour of the actual side of things with which strength of intellect rather than strength of imagination has to deal. As with Swift and Dryden among their fellows, so with Ford

among his, the first great quality that strikes a student is the force of grasp, the precision of design, the positive and resolute touch with which all things are set down. A dramatic poet of Ford's high quality cannot of course be wanting in beauty and tenderness, in delicacy and elevation, unknown to men whose mightiest gift was that of noble satire, though the genius so applied were as deep and wide and keen, the spirit so put to service as swift and strong and splendid, as that of the two great men just mentioned. Not only the lovely lines above cited, but the very names of Calantha and Penthea, bear witness at once in our memory to the grace and charm of their poet's work at its best. The excess of tragic effect in his scenes, his delight in 'fierce extremes' and volcanic eruptions of character and event, have in the eyes of some critics obscured the milder side of his genius. They are not without excuse. No one who has studied Ford throughout with the care he demands and deserves can fail to feel the want of that sweet and spontaneous fluency which belongs to the men of Shakespeare's school—that birdlike note of passionate music which vibrates in their verse to every breath of joy or sorrow. There is something too much now and then of rule and line, something indeed of hard limitation and apparent rigidity of method. I say this merely by comparison; set against the dramatists of any later school, he will appear as natural and instinctive a singer as any bird of the Shakespearean choir. But of pure imagination, of absolute poetry as distinguished from intellectual force and dramatic ability, no writer of his age except Massinger has less. Yet they are both poets of a high class, dramatists of all but the highest. They both impress us with a belief in their painstaking method of work, in the care and conscience

with which their scenes were wrought out. Neither Ford nor Massinger could have ventured to indulge in the slippery style and shambling license which we pardon in Dekker for the sake of his lyric note and the childlike delicacy of his pathos, his tenderness of colour and his passionate fancy ; nor could they have dared the risk of letting their plays drift loose and shift for themselves at large, making the best that might be made of such rough and unhewn plots as Cyril Tourneur's, Middleton's, or Chapman's—sustained and quickened by the unquenchable and burning fire, the bitter ardour and angry beauty of Tourneur's verse, the grace and force of Middleton's fluent and exuberant invention, the weight of thought and grave resonance of Chapman's gnomic lines. They could not afford to let their work run wild ; they were bound not to write after the erratic fashion of their time. All the work of Massinger, all the serious work of Ford, is the work of an artist who respects alike himself, his art, and the reader or spectator who may come to study it. There is scarcely another dramatic poet of their time for whom as much can be said. On the other hand, there is scarcely another dramatic poet of their time who had not more than they had of those 'raptures' which 'were all air and fire,' of 'that fine madness which rightly should possess a poet's brain.' The just and noble eulogy of Drayton, though appropriate above all to the father of English tragedy, is applicable also more or less to the successors of Marlowe, as well as to the master of the 'mighty line' himself. To Ford it is less appropriate ; to Massinger it is not applicable at all. This is said out of no disrespect or ingratitude to that admirable dramatist, whose graver and lighter studies are alike full of interest and liberal of enjoyment ; but the



highest touch of imagination, the supreme rapture and passion of poetry, he has not felt, and therefore he cannot make us feel.

The story of Giovanni and Annabella was probably based either on fact or tradition ; it may perhaps yet be unearthed in some Italian collection of tales after the manner of Cinthio and Bandello (with the tale of incest in Rosset's *Histoires Tragiques* it has little in common) ; but in spite of Ford's own assertion I am inclined to conjecture that the story sculptured with such noble skill and care in the scenes of *The Broken Heart* was 'all made out of the carver's brain.' In no other play of Ford's are the subordinate figures so studiously finished. In the preceding play all the minor characters are mere outlines of ruffian or imbecile ; here the poet has evidently striven to give fullness of form to all his conceptions, and fullness of life to all his forms. Ithocles, Orgilus, Bassanes, are as thoroughly wrought out as he could leave them ; and in effect the triumphant and splendid ambition of the first, the sullen and subtle persistence of the second, the impure insanity and shameful agony of the third, are well relieved against each other, especially in those scenes where the brilliant youth of the hero is set side by side with the sombre youth of the man he has injured even to death. But here again the whole weight of the action hangs upon the two chief characters ; Calantha and Penthea stand out alone clear in our memory for years after their story has been read. In no play or poem are two types of character more skilfully contrasted ; and no poet ever showed a more singular daring than Ford in killing both heroines by the same death of moral agony. Penthea, the weaker and more womanish of the two, dies slowly, dissolves into death with tears and cries of

loud and resentful grief ; Calantha drops dead at the goal of suffering without a word, stabbed to the heart with a sudden silent sorrow. Of all last scenes on any stage, the last scene of this play is the most overwhelming in its unity of outward effect and inward impression. Other tragic poems have closed as grandly, with as much or more of moral and poetic force ; none, I think, with such solemn power of spectacular and spiritual effect combined. As a mere stage show it is so greatly conceived and so triumphantly wrought out, that even with less intense and delicate expression, with less elaborate and stately passion in the measure and movement of the words, it would stamp itself on the memory as a durable thing to admire ; deep-based as it is on solemn and calm emotion, built up with choice and majestic verse, this great scene deserves even the extreme eulogy of its greatest critic.

The tragic genius of Ford takes a softer tone and more tender colour in *The Broken Heart* than in any of his other plays ; except now and then in the part of Bassanes, there are no traces of the ferocity and brutality which mark in the tragedy preceding it such characters as Soranzo, Vasques, and Grimaldi. But here too there is something of Ford's severity, a certain rigid and elaborate precision of work, unlike the sweet seeming instinctiveness, the noble facility of manner and apparent impulse of gracious or majestic speech, which imbues and informs the very highest dramatic style ; the quality which Marlowe and Shakespeare bequeathed to their successors, which kept fresh the verse of Beaumont and Fletcher despite its overmuch easiness and exuberance of mannerism, which gave life to the roughest outlines of Webster, Dekker, Tourneur, which even Marston and Chapman, with

all their faults of crudity and pedantry, showed when they had to rise to the height of any great and tragic argument. The same rigidity is noticeable to some extent in the characters: the marble majesty of Calantha is indeed noble and proper, and gives force and edge to the lofty passion of the catastrophe; but in Penthea too there is something over hard and severe; we find a vein of harshness and bitterness in her angry grief which Shakespeare or indeed Webster would have tempered and sweetened. In the faultless and most exquisite scene where she commits to the princess her legacies of 'three poor jewels,' this bitterness disappears, and the sentiment is as delicate and just as the expression; while the gracious gentleness of Calantha gives a fresh charm of warmth and sympathy to her stately presence and office in the story. The quality of pity here made manifest in her brings her own after suffering within reach of our pity. Again, in the previous interview of Ithocles with Penthea, and above all in her delirious dying talk, there is real and noble pathos, though hardly of the most subtle and heart-piercing kind; and in the parts of Ithocles and Orgilus there is a height and dignity which ennoble alike the slayer and the slain. None could give this quality better than Ford: this, the most complete and equal of his works, is full of it throughout.

From the 'high-tuned poem,' as he justly calls it, which he had here put forth in evidence of his higher and purer part of power, the fall, or collapse rather, in his next work was singular enough. I trust that I shall not be liable to any charge of Puritan prudery though I avow that this play of *Love's Sacrifice* is to me intolerable. In the literal and genuine sense of the word, it is utterly indecent, unseemly and unfit for handling. The conception is essentially foul because

it is essentially false ; and in the sight of art nothing is so foul as falsehood. The incestuous indulgence of Giovanni and Annabella is not improper for tragic treatment ; the obscene abstinence of Fernando and Bianca is wholly improper. There is a coarseness of moral fibre in the whole work which is almost without parallel among our old poets. More than enough has been said of their verbal and spiritual license ; but nowhere else, as far as I know, shall we find within the large limits of our early drama such a figure as Ford's Bianca set up for admiration as a pure and noble type of woman. For once, to my own wonder and regret, I find myself at one with the venomous moralist Gifford on a question of morals, when he observes of ' that most innocent lady ' that ' she is, in fact, a gross and profligate adulteress, and her ridiculous reservations, while they mark her lubricity, only enhance her shame.' The worst is, that we get no moment of relief throughout from the obtrusion of the very vilest elements that go to make up nature and deform it. No height or grandeur of evil is here to glorify, no aspiration or tenderness of afterthought is here to allay, the imbecile baseness, the paltry villainies and idiocies, of the ' treacherous, lecherous, kindless ' reptiles that crawl in and out before our loathing eyes. The language of course is in the main elaborate, pure, and forcible ; the verse often admirable for its stately strength ; but beyond this we can find nothing to plead in extenuation of uncleanness and absurdity. The only apparent aim of the quasi-comic interludes is to prove the possibility of producing something even more hateful than the tragic parts. The indecency of Ford's farcical underplots is an offence above all things to art. How it may seem from the preacher's point of view is no present concern

of ours ; perhaps he might find it by comparison harmless and powerless, as assuredly it can attract or allure the intellect or the senses of no creature above the level of apes and swine ; but in the artist's eyes it is insufferable and damnable. Without spirit, without humour, without grace, it encumbers the scene as with dried and congealed filth. In the face of much exquisite work of painter and sculptor, poet and humourist, which is anything but conventionally decent, we cannot allow that art must needs 'lean to virtue's side,' and lend her voice or hand to swell the verdict or prop the pulpit of judge or moralist ; but two things she cannot away with ; by the very law of her life, by the very condition of her being, she is bound to reject whatever is brutal, whatever is prurient ; Swift cannot bend her to the worship of Cloacina, Moore cannot teach her the lisp and leer of his toad-faced Cupids. Great men may sin by mad violence and brutality, like that fierce world-satirist who stood out with lacerated heart against all bitterest infliction and 'envious wrath of man or God,' a Titan blasted by the fires but not beaten by the strokes of heaven ; but small men only can teach their tongues the tittering accent of a vicious valet, the wriggling prurience of such lackey's literature as is handed round on a salver to the patrons of drawing-room rhymesters and ante-chamber witlings. Ford was a poet, and a poet of high mark ; he could not therefore, even in a meaner age, have learnt the whimper or the smirk of sentimental or jocose prurience ; he could never have submitted to ignoble handling the sweet or bitter emotions and passions of sense or spirit ; all torture and all rapture of the flesh or of the soul he would always have treated with the frank and serious freedom of the artist, never with the bragging and simpering



petulance of the social poetaster and parasitic plagiarist ; but the other inadmissible thing he has too often admitted within the precinct of his work. The dull brutality of his lame and laborious farce is a fault quite unlike the faults of his fellows ; his cold and dry manner makes his buffoonery at once rancid and insipid ; while the ' bluff beastliness ' of Jonson's plebeian part, the overflowing and boyish wantonness of Fletcher, the foul-mouthed fidelity of Dekker's transcripts from the low life of his period, even the rank breadth of Marston's shameless satire, may admit of excuse in the sight of art, the pointless and spiritless license of Ford's attempts at comedy can be neither honourably excused nor reasonably explained. Of Shakespeare alone we can be sure that no touch is wrong, no tone too broad, no colour too high for the noble and necessary purposes of his art ; but of his followers, if excuse be needed for their errors and excesses, the most may plead in palliation either the height of spirits and buoyancy of blood, or the passion of a fierce sincerity, or the force and flavour of strong comic genius, or the relief given by contrast to the high pure beauty of the main work ; all alike may plead the freedom of the time, the freshness of young life and energy of the dawn, working as they did when the art was new-born, too strong a child of earth and heaven and too joyous to keep always a guard on its ways and words, to walk always within bounds and speak always within compass. But Ford is no poetic priest or spiritual witness against evil, whose lips have been touched with the live coal of sacred satire, and set on fire of angry prophecy ; the wrath and scorn of Jonson, the rage of Tourneur and the bitterness of Marston, find in him no echo of response ; and of the bright sweet flow and force of life which feed as from

a springing fountain the joyful genius of Beaumont and Fletcher, of the gladness and grace of that wild light Muse who sings 'as if she would never grow old,' whether her song be of men's joy or sorrow, he has nothing to show in excuse of worse faults than theirs ; with him

The heyday in the blood is tame, it 's humble,  
And waits upon the judgment.

Massinger has been accused of the same dull and deliberate license of speech ; but Massinger, though poor in verbal wit, had a strong and grave humour, an occasional breadth and warmth of comic invention, which redeems his defects or offences. Hartley Coleridge, in his notice of the two poets, says that Massinger would have been the dullest of all bad jokers, had not Ford contrived to be still duller. But Massinger, if not buoyant and brilliant as Fletcher, or rich with the spiritual wealth and strong with the gigantic thews of Jonson, has his own place of honour in pure as well as mixed comedy ; Belgarde, Justice Greedy, Borachia, and others, are worthy to stand, in their lower line of humour, below the higher level of such studies as *Overreach* and *Luke* ; whereas, if Ford's lighter characters are ever inoffensive for a moment, it is all that can be said of them, and more than could be hoped. The strength and intensity of his genius require a tragic soil to flourish in, an air of tragedy to breathe ; its lightning is keenest where the night of emotion and event is darkest in which it moves and works. In romantic drama or mixed comedy it shines still at times with a lambent grace and temperance of light ; but outside the limit of serious thought and feeling it is quenched at once, and leaves but an unsavoury fume behind. Even in those higher

latitudes the moral air is not always of the clearest ; the sanctity of Giovanni's confessor, for example, has something of the compliant quality of Bianca's virtue ; it sits so loosely and easily on him that, fresh from the confession of Annabella's incest, he assists in plighting her hand to Soranzo, and passing off on the bridegroom as immaculate a woman whom he knows to be with child by her brother ; and this immediately after that most noble scene in which the terror and splendour of his rebuke has bowed to the very dust before him the fair face and the ruined soul of his penitent. After this we cannot quite agree with Macaulay that Ford has in this play ' assigned a highly creditable part to the friar ' ; but certainly he has the most creditable part there is to play ; and as certainly he was designed on the whole for a type of sincere and holy charity. The jarring and startling effect of such moral discords weakens the poet's hold on the reader by the shock they give to his faith and sympathy. Beaumont and Fletcher have sinned heavily in the same way ; and the result is that several of their virtuous characters are more really and more justly offensive to the natural sense, more unsavoury to the spiritual taste, than any wantonness of words or extravagance of action can make their representative figures of vice.

In the gallery of Ford's works, as in the gallery of Webster's, there is one which seems designed as a sample of regular and classic form, a sedate study after a given model. Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* holds the same place on his stage as *Appius and Virginia* does on Webster's. In both plays there is a perfect unity of action, a perfect straightforwardness of design ; all is clear, orderly, direct to the point ; there is no outgrowth or overgrowth of fancy, there are no byways

of poetry to divert the single progress of the story. By the side of *The Duchess of Malfy* or *The Broken Heart* they look rigid and bare. Both are noble works ; Webster's has of course the more ardour and vehemence of power, Ford's has perhaps the more completeness of stage effect and careful composition. The firmness and fidelity of hand with which his leading characters are drawn could only be shown by a dissection of the whole play scene by scene. The simple and lofty purity of conception, the exact and delicate accuracy of execution, are alike unimpaired by any slip or flaw of judgment or of feeling. The heroic sincerity of Warbeck, his high courtesy and constancy, his frank gratitude and chivalrous confidence, give worthy proof of Ford's ability to design a figure of stainless and exalted presence ; the sad strong faith of his wife, the pure and daring devotion of the lover who has lost her, the petulant and pathetic pride of her father, all melted at last into stately sympathy and approval of her truth in extremity of trial ; and, more than all these, the noble mutual recognition and regard of Warbeck and Dalyell in the time of final test ; are qualities which raise this drama to the highest place among its compeers for moral tone and effect. The two kings are faithful and forcible studies ; the smooth resolute equanimity and self-reliant craft of the first Tudor sets off the shallow chivalry and passionate unstable energy of the man of Flodden. The insolent violence of constraint put upon Huntley in the disposal of his daughter's hand is of a piece with the almost brutal tone of contempt assumed towards Warbeck, when he begins to weary of supporting the weaker cause for the mere sake of magnanimous display and irritable self-assertion. His ultimate dismissal of the star-crossed pretender is ' perfect Stuart ' in its bland

abnegation of faith and the lofty courtliness of manner with which engagements are flung over and pledges waved aside ; whether intentionally or not, Ford has touched off to the life the family habit of repudiation, the hereditary faculty of finding the most honourable way to do the most dishonourable things. Nor is the other type of royalty less excellently real and vivid ; the mixture of warmth and ceremony in Katherine's reception by Henry throws into fresh and final relief the implacable placidity of infliction with which he marks her husband for utmost ignominy of suffering.

Of imaginative beauty and poetic passion this play has nothing ; but for noble and equable design of character it stands at the head of Ford's works. There is no clearer example in our literature of the truth of the axiom repeated by Mr. Arnold from the teaching of the supreme Greek masters, that ' all depends upon the subject.' There are perhaps more beautiful lines in *Love's Sacrifice* than in *Perkin Warbeck* ; yet the former play is utterly abortive and repulsive, a monument of discomfiture and discredit, as the latter of noble aim and noble success. It is the one high sample of historic drama produced between the age of Shakespeare and our own ; the one intervening link—a link of solid and durable metal—which connects the first and the latest labours in that line of English poetry ; the one triumphant attempt to sustain and transmit the tradition of that great tragic school founded by Marlowe, perfected by Shakespeare, revived by the author of *Philip van Artevelde*. The central figure of Ford's work is not indeed equal in stature of spirit and strength of handling to the central figure of Sir Henry Taylor's ; there is a broader power, a larger truth, in the character of Artevelde than in the character of Warbeck ; but the high



qualities of interest based on firm and noble grounds, of just sentiment and vital dignity, of weight, force, and exaltation of thought, shown rather in dramatic expansion and development of lofty character by lofty method than in scenes and passages detachable from the context as samples of reflection and expression—these are in great measure common to both poets. Ford, again, has the more tender and skilful hand at drawing a woman ; his heroines make by far the warmer and sharper impression on us ; this on the whole is generally his strongest point, as it is perhaps the other's weakest ; while, though we may not think his female studies up to the mark of his male portraits, there is certainly no English dramatist since Shakespeare who can be matched as a student of men, comparable for strong apprehension and large heroic grasp of masculine character, with the painter of Comnenus, of Artevelde, and of Dunstan.

The three romantic comedies of Ford have the same qualities and shortcomings in common ; they are studious and often elegant in style, sometimes impressive or at least effective in incident, generally inadequate to the chance of excellence offered by the subject ; not so much through careless laxity and incoherence—for the sign of labour and finish is visible upon each ; they have evidently been wrought up to the height and fullness of his design—as through a want of constructive power and mastery of his own conceptions. *The Lover's Melancholy* is the best of the three, as having the best things in it ; two of these are exquisite ; the well-known episode of the lute-player and nightingale, and the reunion of Palador and Eroclea. There are touches of power and tenderness in the part of Meleander, and the courtship of Parthenophil by Thamasta is gracefully and skilfully

managed, without violence or offence. The winding-up of a story ill and feebly conducted through the earlier parts of the play is far more dexterous and harmonious than its development ; and this is about all that need be said of it. Between the two beautiful versions of Strada's pretty fable by Ford and Crashaw there will always be a diversity of judgment among readers ; some must naturally prefer the tender fluency and limpid sweetness of Ford, others the dazzling intricacy and affluence in refinements, the supple and cunning implication, the choiceness and subtlety of Crashaw.

Something better than Ford has left us might have been made of *The Fancies Chaste and Noble* and *The Lady's Trial*. In the former play the character of Flavia is admirably conceived ; there were excellent possibilities of interest and pathos in her part, and her first interview with the husband who had sold and discarded her under cover of a lie gives promise that something will come of these chances ; but in effect they come to nothing ; the tragic effect of the position is evaded, the force of the conception diluted, the outlines of character slurred and effaced. Again, we are led to look for more than we get from the scenes of Castamela's mock temptation and seeming peril, from her grave and confident dignity in face of trial, and the spirit with which she assumes a lifelike mask of haughty and corrupt levity to punish the reckless weakness of a brother who has wantonly exposed her to apparent danger ; but all ends in futile surprise and flat insufficiency. Livio and Romanello, the brothers of the heroines, are figures too dull and feeble to rouse any stronger feeling than a dull and feeble curiosity to see how they will slip or slink out of situations which might have been full of spirit

and interest. The remaining characters are colourless and formless. Of the brutal and brainless interludes of farce I have no more to say than has been said above. With more force and harmony of character the finest occasion in the play might have been put to admirable use ; when Livio, in hopes to rescue his sister from shame, offers her hand to the suitor whom he formerly rejected, and finds her in turn refused by Romanello on suspicion of dishonour incurred through her brother's baseness. The presence and intercession of Romanello's own sister, herself newly and nobly vindicated in his eyes and reconciled to his love, should have added to the living interest of the scene ; but between curtailed plot and truncated underplot all such possible interest has long since been stifled.

The same waste or misuse of good material has marred the promise of a better play in *The Lady's Trial*. This should have been an excellent example of romantic or serious comedy ; had Ford been content thoroughly to work out the characters of Auria, his wife, and her kinsman, he must have given us again a study of high and delicate moral beauty, a group worthy to stand beside the noble triad of Warbeck, Katherine, and Dalyell ; but as it is, shackled perhaps by a fear of repeating himself, he has missed or thrown away this chance also. The one scene in which the spotless and hopeless chivalry of Malfato's love for his kinswoman is brought into action comes too late in the play and too suddenly to make its effect. There are two or three passages of admirable energy and pathos in the part of Auria ; but the upshot of all is again ineffective ; the evolution of the main story is clogged and trammelled by the utterly useless and pointless episode of Adurni's cast mistress, her senseless schemes of love and revenge, her equivocal

reformation and preposterous remarriage. All this encumbrance of rubbish has absolutely no excuse, no aim or reason of any kind ; it serves merely to hamper the development and distort the progress of the play, leaving no room or time for the action to expand naturally and move smoothly forward to a consistent end. The underplot of Hippolita's attempted revenge on the lover who has discarded her is neither beautiful nor necessary to the main action of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* ; but it is skilfully wrought in, and so far serviceable that it effectually cuts off Soranzo's chance of arousing such interest or sympathy as might divert the reader's mind from the central figures of Giovanni and Annabella ; in this case the discarded adulteress and her cast-off husband are mere worthless impediments which subserve no end whatever.

Of the two plays which bear conjointly the names of Ford and Dekker, *The Sun's Darling* is evidently, as Gifford calls it, a 'piece of patchwork' hastily stitched up for some momentary purpose ; I suspect that the two poets did not work together on it, but that our present text is merely a recast by Ford of an earlier masque by Dekker ; probably, as Mr. Collier has suggested, his lost play of *Phaëton*, for which we might be glad to exchange the 'loop'd and window'd nakedness' of this ragged version. In those parts which are plainly remnants of Dekker's handiwork there are some scattered lines of great sweetness, such as these of lament for the dead spring :—

How cool wert thou in anger ! in thy diet  
 How temperate and yet sumptuous ! thou wouldst not waste  
*The weight of a sad violet* in excess,  
 Yet still thy board had dishes numberless ;  
 Dumb beasts even lovèd thee ; once a young lark  
 Sat on thy hand, and gazing on thine eyes  
 Mounted and sang, thinking them moving skies.

For the latter scenes, as Gifford observes, it is clear that Ford is in the main responsible ; the intrusion in the fifth act of political satire and adulation is singularly perverse and infelicitous. In the opening scene, also, between Raybright and the Priest of the Sun, I recognise the moral tone and metrical regulation of Ford's verse. Whatever the original may have been—and it was probably but a thin and hasty piece of work—it has doubtless suffered from the incongruous matter loosely sewn on to it ; and the masque as it stands is too lax and incoherent in structure to be worth much as a sample of its slight kind, or to show if there was anything of more significance or value in the first conception.

*The Witch of Edmonton* is a play of rare beauty and importance both on poetical and social grounds. It is perhaps the first protest of the stage against the horrors and brutalities of vulgar superstition ; a protest all the more precious for the absolute faith in witchcraft and devilry which goes hand in hand with compassion for the instruments as well as the victims of magic. Dr. Theodorus Plönnies himself had not a heartier belief in the sorceries of Sidonia von Bork than the poets appear to have in the misdeeds of Mother Sawyer ; while neither Meinhold nor any modern writer has shown a nobler abhorrence of the genuinely hellish follies and cruelties which brought forth in natural and regular order fresh crops of witches to torture and burn. Even Victor Hugo could hardly show a more tender and more bitter pity for the sordid and grovelling agonies of outcast old age and reprobate misery, than that which fills and fires the speech of the wretched hag from the first scene where she appears gathering sticks to warm herself, starved, beaten, lamed and bent double with



blows, pitiable and terrible in her fierce abjection, to the last moment when she is led to execution through the roar of the rabble. In all this part of the play I trace the hand of Dekker; his intimate and familiar science of wretchedness, his great and gentle spirit of compassion for the poor and suffering with whom his own lot in life was so often cast, in prison and out. The two chief soliloquies of Mother Sawyer, her first and last invocations of the familiar, are noble samples of his passionate dramatic power; their style has a fiery impulse and rapidity quite unlike the usual manner of his colleague. Gifford was probably right in assigning to Ford the whole of the first act; there is no more admirable exposition of a play on the English stage; the perfect skill and the straightforward power with which the plan of the story is opened and the interest of the reader fixed are made the more evident by the direct simplicity of method and means used. Ford, therefore, must have the credit of first bringing forward two of the main characters in the domestic tragedy which makes up the better part of this composite play; and the introduction of Frank and Winnifrede gives ominous and instant promise of the terror and pathos of their after story. The part of Susan is one of Decker's most beautiful and delicate studies; in three short scenes he has given an image so perfect in its simple sweetness as hardly to be overmatched outside the gallery of Shakespeare's women. The tender freshness of his pathos, its plain frank qualities of grace and strength, never showed themselves with purer or more powerful effect than here; the after scene where Frank's guilt is discovered has the same force and vivid beauty. The interview of Frank with the disguised Winnifrede in this scene may be compared

by the student of dramatic style with the parting of the same characters at the close ; the one has all the poignant simplicity of Dekker, the other all the majestic energy of Ford. The rough buffoonery and horse-play of the clown and the familiar we may probably set down to Dekker's account ; there is not much humour or meaning in it, but it is livelier and less offensive than most of Ford's attempts in that line. The want of connection between the two subjects of the play, Mother Sawyer's witchcraft and Frank Thorney's bigamy, is a defect common to many plays of the time, noble sketches of rough and rapid workmanship ; but in this case the tenuity of the connecting link is such that despite the momentary intervention of her familiar the witch is able with perfect truth to disclaim all complicity with the murderer. Such a communion of guilt might easily have been managed, and the tragic structure of the poem would have been complete in harmony of interest.

No words need here be wasted on any verse of Ford's outside the range of his dramatic work ; and of his two pamphlets in prose the first is an ephemeral and official piece of compliment, somewhat too dull and stiff in style to be a truly graceful offering 'in honour of all fair ladies.' The second 'handful of discourse' has rather more worth and dignity of moral eloquence. The examples chosen from his own age for praise or blame add some historical interest to his axioms and arguments ; the sketch of Raleigh, unhappily imperfect as it is, seems from the fragment left us to have given a vigorous and discerning estimate of 'a man known and well deserving to be known.' The reader of this treatise will remark, with such comic or tragic reflections as he may find appropriate,

the passage in which Ford—having discussed and dismissed as inadequate such minor epithets of eulogy as ‘the Peaceable,’ ‘the Learned,’ and even ‘the Great’—finally and emphatically bestows on the yet living majesty of England the surname for all time of James the Good. The poet is so emphatic in his disclaimer of ‘servility or insinuation’ that we might imagine him writing with an eye to the reversion of Jonson’s laurel.

‘Ford was of the first order of poets’: such is the verdict of his earliest and greatest critic. To differ from Lamb on a matter of judgment relating to any great name of the English drama is always hazardous; it is a risk never to be lightly run, never to be incurred without grave reluctance; and to undervalue so noble a poet as Ford, a very early and close favourite of my own studies, must be even further from my wish than to depreciate the value of such a verdict in his favour. Yet perhaps it would be more accurate to say merely that his good qualities are also great qualities—that whenever his work is good it is greatly good—than to say that he was altogether one of the few greatest among great men who stand in that very first order of poets. Thus much assuredly we may admit with all confidence and gladness of gratitude; that the merits he has are merits of the first order. What these merits are no student of his poetry can fail to see. As to their kind there can be no dispute; as to the relative height of rank to which they suffice of themselves to raise a poet, there may be. They are not outward or superficial qualities; a somewhat more liberal sprinkling of these would have relieved and brightened the sombre beauties of his work. His power as a poet is simply a moral power; fancy he has none, and imagination only strong to deal with

tragic sentiment and situation ; strong to dive and keen to peer into depths of emotion and recesses of endurance *dove il sol tace*, not swift or light of wing, not vast or ethereal of flight, not lustrous or various of plumage ; but piercing and intense of sight, steady and sure of stroke, solemn and profound of strain. He gains strength with the strength of his subject ; he wants deep water to swim well. The moral nature with which he is fittest to deal must be large enough to dare or to bear things beyond all common measure ; resolute for any deed or any doom. Within the usual scope of action or the ordinary limit of suffering the energy of his spirit has hardly free play. In the hard cast and sombre loneliness of this energy he resembles Byron on one side—the outer side rather than the inner faculty ; though there is in both the same fixity and insistence of purpose, the same solitary and brooding weight of will, the same lurid force and singleness of mind. In light, imagination, musical instinct, and all qualities of poetry pure and simple, both are alike below the higher order of poets ; in the verse of neither is there that instant and sensible melody which comes only of a secret and sovereign harmony of the whole nature, and which comes of it inevitably and unmistakably.

We often see the names of Webster and Ford bracketed as equal and parallel examples of the same kind or school of poets ; to me these two great men seem to belong to wholly different orders ; I should no more venture to set Ford by the side of Webster than Byron by the side of Shelley. If not altogether as great in degree, the difference is assuredly the same in kind. On this as on all grounds we must keenly regret the loss of the one play known to us by name in which the diverse forces of these poets were

united in the treatment of a subject unsurpassable for terror and tragic suggestion. To trace the points of likeness and unlikeness, to distinguish the lineaments of either man's genius, to note their various handling of an actual and recent tragedy so fearfully fertile of dramatic possibilities, of dark and splendid studies, for a spirit of strength to support them ; to measure by the terrible capacities of the workmen the terrible capabilities of their material ; to divide in our minds feature from feature, comparing line with line and tone with tone ; this would have been a study of greater profit and delight to the student of their art than the comparison we had lately occasion to make between Ford and Dekker. For, though dissimilar in kind as well as in degree, there are points of resemblance between Webster and Ford, especially in bias of mind and aim of contemplation, in choice of matter and sympathy of interest, which may well bring them together in our thoughts and set them by themselves apart ; so that we can conceive of them working together on a poem which when complete should show no signs of incongruity, nothing inharmonious or incoherent ; as we certainly could not conceive of Shelley and Byron. For the rest, though there may be some community of poetic powers and poetic deficiencies between Byron and Ford, neither has any of the other's highest quality ; the emotion shot through with satire, the ardour inwoven with humour, which heighten and sharpen each other in the keenest and loftiest work of Byron, were as unknown to Ford as the truth of deep human passion, the fire that labours without open rage or fury of flame at the heart's root and centre of life itself, the ravage of spiritual waste and agony of travail consuming and exhausting the very nature of the soul, which find



shape and speech in the tragic verse of Ford, were beyond the dramatic reach of Byron. Of all men of genius Ford was probably the worst jester and Byron the worst playwright that ever lived. The living spirit of wit, its poetic and imaginative power, the force and ease of its action, the variety of thought and form into which it enters to fill them with life, never had a medium of expression comparable to the verse of Byron ; in this, the compound and complex product of serious and humorous energy, rather than in power of any simple kind, lay the depth and width of his genius. Ford's dominion was limited to one simple form of power, the knowledge and mastery of passion properly so called, the science of that spiritual state in which the soul suffers force from some dominant thought or feeling. The pain and labour of such imperious possession, the strife and violence of a nature divided against itself, the strong anguish and the strong delight of extremities, gave the only fit field for his work and the only fruitful pasture for his thought. His imperative and earnest genius stamped and burnt itself into the figures and events of his plays : his mark is set ineffaceably on characters and circumstances, the sign-manual of his peculiar empire. Now, of passion proper Byron has nothing ; the one radical emotion in him, deep as life and strong as death, is that noble ardour of rage and scorn which lifts his satire into sublimity ; otherwise his passion is skin-deep ; all his love-making, from the first desire to the final satiety, may be summed up in that famous axiom of Chamfort which Alfred de Musset, his female page or attendant dwarf, prefixed as a label to one of his decoctions of watered Byronism. Whatever he may have known of passion, he could put into verse of a genuine kind nothing beyond the range of the

greater cynic's memorable definition ; if he tries to go further or deeper, his verse rings hollow, his hold grows feeble, his colouring false and his tone inflated. *Facit indignatio versum*, and admirably too ; the strength and splendour of his wrath give to his denunciations of tyranny a stronger and sincerer life than we find in his invocations to patriotism ; in him Apollo was incarnate only as the dragon-slayer : he might stand so in sculpture with King George for Python, his arrow still quivering in the royal carrion. Of all divine labours that was the one which fell to his share of work ; of all the god his master's gifts that was the one allotted him. But for positive passion, for that absolute fusion of the whole nature in one fire of sense and spirit which only the great dramatic students and masters of man can give or comprehend, we must go to poets of another kind. These have flesh and blood, muscle and nerve enough in all conscience ; but passion with them means something beyond '*l'échange de deux fantaisies et le contact de deux épidermes*' ; they want all that and more as fuel for their fires ; they deal neither with soulless bodies nor with bodiless souls. Among them Ford must always hold a place of high honour. Two at least, yet perhaps only two, of his great fellow tragedians—for Shakespeare is of no fellowship—were certainly, in my judgment, poets of higher race and rarer quality. These two were Marlowe and Webster. The founder of our tragedy has in his best verse all the light and music and colour proper to the dawn of so divine a day as opened with his sunrise ; and in Webster there is so much of the godhead which put on perfect humanity in Shakespeare alone, that it would scarcely be more rational to couple for comparison *The Broken Heart* with *The Duchess of Malfy* than *The Duchess of Malfy*

with *King Lear*. In one point Ford is excelled by others also of his age. As a lyric poet he is not quite of the highest class in that great lyrical school. Not that his few lyrics are unworthy the praise they have before now received ; the best of them, such as the noble dirge which signals with its majesty of music the consummation of Calantha's agony, have an august beauty and dignity of their own. The verse has a marble stateliness and solidity ; the grave and even measure carries weight and sufficiency with it ; but the pure lyric note is not in this poet. He has no such outbreaks of birdlike or godlike song as Shakespeare's—

Roses, their sharp spines being gone—

or Fletcher's—

Hear, ye ladies that despise—

or Webster's—

Hark, now everything is still—

or Dekker's—

Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers ?

After any of these the lyric verse of Ford strikes us as verse ruled out in hard and rigid lines ; yet is it excellent in its kind, and contemporary dramatists of high rank and repute have never come near its excellence ; witness Massinger, the worst song-writer of them all.

Upon the whole then we find ample reason to assign high rank in the highest school of tragedy to this poet. Dekker, with all his sweetness of natural passion, his tenderness of moral music and freshness of pathetic power, has left no work of such tragic strength and

scope, such firmness of line and clearness of composition, such general height and equality of poetic worth, as the two masterpieces of Ford. Had Marston oftener written at his best, he might have matched Ford on his own ground of energetic intensity and might of moral grasp, while excelling him in the depth and delicacy of keen rare touches or flashes of subtle nature, such as his famous epithet of 'the shuddering morn,' and other fine thoughts of colour and strokes of pensive passion; but Marston almost always wrote very much below his best. The character of Andrugio in *Antonio and Mellida* is magnificent; but this grand figure is unequally sustained by the others; and superb as the part is throughout, one part can no more make a play than one swallow can make a summer; not though that part were Hamlet. Set among mean and discordant figures, without support or relief, the part of Hamlet, the greatest single work of man, would not of itself suffice to make a play. The noble thought and the noble verse of Marston are never fitly framed and chased; lying imbedded as his best work does in meaner matter, it cannot hold its own when set beside the work of men who could cut as well as unearth a jewel. The pure simplicity of Heywood, his homely and lively fertility of invention, his honest pathos and gentleness of feeling, give a real charm to his sweet and clear flow of plain verse, but not weight and force enough to support the fame of a tragic poet of the first rank. Middleton had more facility and freedom of hand, less height and concentration of mind, than Ford; Massinger had far more fluency, regularity, and variety of interest, but far less tragic depth and directness of force. Chapman's plays, overweighted with thoughtful and majestic eloquence, sink down and break short under the splendid burden,

or wander into empty lands and among rocky places of barren declamation ; as a tragic artist he must give place to lesser men. With a far more genuinely dramatic gift, the fiery spirit of Cyril Tourneur lived and laboured in such a tempest that his work, so to speak, is blown out of all shape ; the burning blast of his genius rages without intermission at such stormy speed along such wild wastes of tragedy that we have hardly time to note the fresh beauty of a rare oasis here and there ; but for keenness and mastery of passionate expression in sublime and sonorous verse he can hardly be overmatched : while for single lines of that intense and terrible beauty which makes incision in the memory, there is none, after Shakespeare, to compare with him but Webster ; the grandest verses of Marston or Chapman, both great in their use of deep and ardent words to give life and form to moral passion, have less of cautery in their stroke. Against his tragedies as against theirs the charge of excess and violence may be fairly brought, and the brand of such epithets as ' spasmodic ' and ' horrible ' may be set on their choice and composition of incidents ; though the pure and strong limpidity of Tourneur's style is never broken into the turbid froth and turgid whirlpools of tortuous rant which here and there convulse and deface the vigorous currents of Chapman's and Marston's. But the application of any such stigmatic phrase to the work of Webster is absurd. If it be true that his tragedies exemplify the old distinction of horrible from terrible, it must be as superb instances of terrible beauty undeformed by horrible detail. There is no such scene or incident in his two great plays as the blinding of Gloster in *King Lear* ; nothing from which the physical sense recoils with such a shudder of instant sickness ; nothing defensible



only on the ground that where all scenes are terrible to the utmost limit that art can endure, one scene among them may be for once allowed to be simply horrible. Defensible or not, the license was claimed and the experiment made by Shakespeare, and not by Webster. Nor, again, are any of the lesser poet's characters so liable to the charge of monstrous or abnormal excess as the figures of Goneril and Regan ; the wickedness of his worst villain never goes beyond the mark of Edmund's. To vindicate the comparative moderation of Webster's moral painting is not to impugn in any least degree the rectitude of Shakespeare's ; but it is absurd for those who see no excess of horror in the incidents or of criminality in the characters of the master poet to impeach the greatest of his disciples for the exercise of much less liberty in his handling of criminal and terrible matter. Simplicity and purity mark the most tragic scenes and figures of Webster, not less than sublimity and sweetness. Nothing on a first study of *The Duchess of Malfy* makes deeper impression on a capable student than this negative quality of noble abstinence, the utter and most admirable absence of any chaotic or spasmodic element, the chastity of a controlling instinct which rejects as impossible all hollow extravagance and inflation, ' even in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) the whirlwind of passion.' For one instance, if the comparison is to be made, we cannot but see that the curse of the Duchess on her brothers is less intemperate in the excess and exaltation of its rage than the curse of Lear on his daughters ; which of course is as it should be, but is not what the general verdict of critics on Webster's art and style would have led us to expect. The note of extravagance is far more real and far more patent in the tragic genius of Beaumont and Fletcher.

Of their comic power there is here no more question than of Jonson's or Massinger's or any other's ; we are concerned merely to examine by comparison the rank among tragic poets of a poet who was nothing if not tragic. In this field, then, we find 'those suns of glory, those two lights of men,' the Dioscuri of our 'heaven of invention,' to be swifter and gracefuller runners than Ford, but neither surer of foot nor stronger of hand. Their genius has more of flame and light, less of fire and intensity ; more of air and ease, less of force and concentration ; more of beautiful and graceful qualities, less of positive and severe capacity ; there is more of a charm about it, and less of a spell. With all its great and affluent beauties, *The Maid's Tragedy* leaves a less absolute and inevitable mark upon the mind of a student than *The Broken Heart*. No poet is less forgetable than Ford ; none fastens (as it were) the fangs of his genius and his will more deeply in your memory. You cannot shake hands with him and pass by ; you cannot fall in with him and out again at pleasure ; if he touch you once he takes you, and what he takes he keeps his hold of ; his work becomes part of your thought and parcel of your spiritual furniture for ever ; he signs himself upon you as with a seal of deliberate and decisive power. His force is never the force of accident ; the casual divinity of beauty which falls as though direct from heaven upon stray lines and phrases of some poets falls never by any such heavenly chance on his ; his strength of impulse is matched by his strength of will ; he never works more by instinct than by resolution ; he knows what he would have and what he will do, and gains his end and does his work with full conscience of purpose and insistence of design. By the might of a great will seconded by the force of a great hand he won the place

he holds against all odds of rivalry in a race of rival giants. In that gallery of monumental men and mighty memories, among or above the fellows of his godlike craft, the high figure of Ford stands steadily erect ; his name is ineffaceable from the scroll of our great writers ; it is one of the loftier landmarks of English poetry.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER





## BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

THE critical memoir prefixed by Mr. Dyce to the only good and scholarlike edition of Beaumont and Fletcher has summed up once for all, in fullness of perfect order, what little can now be known of their lives. From this complete and careful record we may take a few main facts and necessary dates illustrative of the life and work of either and of both. Six or seven years before the birth of his brother in art, John Fletcher was born in December 1579 at Rye in Sussex, and baptized on the 20th of the same month. Richard Fletcher, his father, afterwards queen's chaplain, dean of Peterborough, and bishop successively of Bristol, Worcester, and London, was then minister of the parish in which the son was born who was to make their name immortal. That son was just turned of seven when the dean distinguished and disgraced himself as the spiritual tormentor of Mary Stuart's last moments. When not quite twelve he was admitted pensioner of Bene't College, Cambridge, and two years later was made one of the Bible-clerks : of this college Bishop Fletcher had been president twenty years earlier, and six months before his son's admission had received from its authorities a first letter of thanks for various benefactions, to be followed next year by a second. Four years later than this, when John Fletcher wanted five or six months of his seventeenth year, the bishop died suddenly of overmuch tobacco and the displeasure of Queen Elizabeth at his second marriage—this time, it appears, with a lady of such character as figures something too frequently on the stage of his illustrious

son. He left eight children by his first marriage in such distress that their uncle, Dr. Giles Fletcher, author of a treatise on the Russian commonwealth which is still held in some repute, was obliged to draw up a petition to the queen on their behalf, which was supported by the intercession of Essex, but with what result is uncertain. From this date we know nothing of the fortunes of John Fletcher, till the needy orphan boy of seventeen reappears as the brilliant and triumphant poet whose name is linked for all time with the yet more glorious name of Francis Beaumont, third and youngest son of Sir Francis Beaumont of Grâce-Dieu, one of the justices of the Common Pleas ; born, according to general report, in 1586, but, according to more than one apparently irrefragable document, actually born at least a year earlier. The first record of his existence is the entry of his name, together with those of his elder brothers Henry and John, as a gentleman-commoner of Broadgates Hall, Oxford, now supplanted by Pembroke College. But most lovers of his fame will care rather to remember the admirable lines of Wordsworth on the 'eager child' who played among the rocks and woodlands of Grâce-Dieu ; though it may be doubted whether even the boy's first verses were of the peaceful and pastoral character attributed to them by the great laureate of the lakes. That passionate and fiery genius which was so soon and for so short a time to 'shake the buskined stage' with heroic and tragic notes of passion and of sorrow, of scorn and rage and slighted love and jealousy, must probably have sought vent from the first in fancies of a more ardent and ambitious kind ; and it would be a likelier conjecture that when Frank Beaumont (as we know on more authorities than one that he was always called by his contemporaries, even in the full flush of

his adult fame—‘never more than Frank,’ says Heywood) went to college at the ripe age of twelve, he had already committed a tragedy or two in emulation of *Tamburlaine*, *Andronicus*, or *Jeronymo*. The date of his admission was February 4, 1597; on April 22 of the following year his father died; and on November 3, 1600, having left Oxford without taking his degree, the boy of fifteen was entered a member of the Inner Temple, his two brothers standing sponsors on the grave occasion. But the son of Judge Beaumont was no fitter for success at the bar than the son of Bishop Fletcher for distinction in the church: it is equally difficult to imagine either poet invested with either gown. Two years later appeared the poem of *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*, a voluptuous and voluminous expansion of the Ovidian legend, not on the whole discreditable to a lad of seventeen, fresh from the popular love-poems of Marlowe and Shakespeare, which it naturally exceeds in long-winded and fantastic diffusion of episodes and conceits. At twenty-two Beaumont prefixed to the magnificent masterpiece of Ben Jonson some noticeable verses in honour of his ‘dear friend’ the author; and in the same year (1607) appeared the anonymous comedy of *The Woman-Hater*, usually assigned to Fletcher alone; but being as it is in the main a crude and puerile imitation of Jonson’s manner, and certainly more like a man’s work at twenty-two than at twenty-eight, internal evidence would seem to justify, or at least to excuse, those critics who in the teeth of high authority and tradition would transfer from Fletcher to Beaumont the principal responsibility for this first play that can be traced to the hand of either. As Fletcher also prefixed to the first edition of *Volpone* a copy of commendatory verses, we may presume that their common admiration for a

common friend was among the earliest and strongest influences which drew together the two great poets whose names were thenceforward to be for ever indivisible. During the dim eleven years between the death of his father and the dawn of his fame, we cannot but imagine that the career of Fletcher had been unprosperous as well as obscure. From seventeen to twenty-eight his youth may presumably have been spent in such painful struggles for success, if not for sustenance, as were never known to his younger colleague, who, as we have seen, was entered at Oxford a few months after Fletcher must in all likelihood have left Cambridge to try his luck in London; a venture most probably resolved on as soon as the youth had found his family reduced by the father's death to such ruinous straits that any smoother course can hardly have been open to him. Entering college at the same age as Fletcher had entered six years earlier, Beaumont had before him a brighter and briefer line of life than his elder. But whatever may have been their respective situations when, either by happy chance or, as Mr. Dyce suggests, by the good offices of Jonson, they were first brought together, their intimacy soon became so much closer than that of ordinary brothers that the household which they shared as bachelors was conducted on such thoroughly communistic principles as might have satisfied the most trenchant theorist who ever proclaimed, as the cardinal point of his doctrine, a complete and absolute community of bed and board, with all goods thereto appertaining. But in the year following that in which the two younger poets had united in homage to Jonson, they had entered into a partnership of more importance than this in 'the same clothes and cloak,' etc., with other necessities of life specified by Aubrey. In 1608,

if we may trust the reckoning which seems trustworthy, the twin stars of our stage rose visibly together for the first time. The loveliest though not the loftiest of tragic plays that we owe to the comrades or the successors of Shakespeare, *Philaster*, has always been regarded as the first-born issue of their common genius. The noble tragedy of *Thierry and Theodoret* has generally been dated earlier and assigned to Fletcher alone ; but we can be sure neither of the early date nor the single authorship. The main body of the play, comprising both the great scenes which throw out into full and final relief the character of either heroine for perfect good or evil, bears throughout the unmistakable image and superscription of Fletcher ; yet there are parts which for gravity and steady strength of style, for reserve and temperance of effect, would seem to suggest the collaboration of a calmer and more patient hand ; and these more equable and less passionate parts of the poem recall rather the touch of Massinger than of Beaumont. In the second act, for example, the regular structure of the verse, the even scheme of the action, the exaggerated braggardism which makes of the hero a mere puppet or mouthpiece of his own self-will, are all qualities which, for better or for worse, remind us of the strength or the weakness of a poet with whom we know that Fletcher, before or after his alliance with Beaumont, did now and then work in common. Even the Arbaces of Beaumont, though somewhat too highly coloured, does not ' write himself down an ass,' like Thierry on his first entrance, after the too frequent fashion of Massinger's braggarts and tyrants ; does not proclaim at starting or display with mere wantonness of exposure his more unlovely qualities in the naked nature of their deformity. Compare also the second with the



first scene of the fourth act. In style and metre this second scene is as good an example of Massinger as the first is of Fletcher at his best. Observe especially in the elaborate narrative of the pretended self-immolation of Ordella these distinctive notes of the peculiar style of Massinger ; the excess of parenthetical sentences, no less than five in a space of twenty lines ; the classical commonplace of allusion to Athens, Rome, and Sparta in one superfluous breath ; the pure and vigorous but somewhat level and prosaic order of language, with the use of certain cheap and easy phrases familiar to Massinger as catchwords ; the flat and feeble terminations by means of which the final syllable of one verse runs on into the next without more pause or rhythm than in a passage of prose ; the general dignity and gravity of sustained and measured expression. These are the very points in which the style of Massinger differs from that of Fletcher ; whose lightest and loosest verses do not overlap each other without sensible distinction between the end of one line and the beginning of the next ; who is often too fluent and facile to be choice or forcible in his diction, but seldom if ever prosaic or conventional in phrase or allusion, and by no means habitually given to weave thoughts within thoughts, knit sentence into sentence, and hang whole paragraphs together by the help of loops and brackets. From these indications we might infer that this poem belongs altogether to a period later than the death of Beaumont ; though even during his friend's life it appears that Fletcher was once at least allied with Massinger and two lesser dramatists in the composition of some play now unknown to men.

Hardly eight years of toil and triumph, of joyous and glorious life, were spared by destiny to the younger poet between the date assigned to the first radiant

revelation of his genius in *Philaster* and the date which marks the end of all his labours. On the 6th of March, 1616, Francis Beaumont died; according to Jonson and tradition, 'ere he was thirty years of age'; but this we have seen to be inconsistent with the registry of his entrance at Oxford. If we may trust the elegiac evidence of friends, he died of his own genius and fiery overwork of brain; yet from the magnificent and masculine beauty of his portrait one would certainly never have guessed that any strain of spirit or stress of invention could have worn out so long before its time so fair and royal a temple for so bright and affluent a soul. A student of physiognomy will not fail to mark the points of likeness and of difference between the faces of the two friends; both models of noble manhood, handsome and significant in feature and expression alike;—Beaumont's the statelier and serener of the two, with clear thoughtful eyes, full arched brows, and strong aquiline nose; a grave and beautiful mouth, with full and finely curved lips; the form of face a long pure oval, and the imperial head with its 'fair large front' and clustering hair set firm and carried high with an aspect at once of quiet command and kingly observation: Fletcher's a more keen and fervid face, sharper in outline every way, with an air of bright ardour and glad fiery impatience; sanguine and nervous, suiting the complexion and colour of hair; the expression of the eager eyes and lips almost recalling that of a noble hound in act to break the leash it strains at;—two heads as lordly of feature and as expressive of aspect as any gallery of great men can show. That spring of 1616, we may note in passing, was the darkest that ever dawned upon England or the world; for, just forty-eight days afterwards, it witnessed, on the 23rd of April, the removal from earth

of the mightiest genius that ever dwelt among men. Scarcely more than a month and a half divided the death-days of Beaumont and of Shakespeare. Some three years earlier, by Mr. Dyce's estimate, when about the age of twenty-eight, Beaumont had married Ursula, daughter and co-heiress to Henry Isley of Sundridge in Kent, by whom he left two daughters, one of them posthumous. Fletcher survived his friend just nine years and five months ; he died ' in the great plague, 1625,' and was buried on the 29th of August in St. Saviour's, Southwark ; not, as we might have wished, beside his younger fellow in fame, who but three days after his untimely death had added another deathless memory to the graves of our great men in Westminster Abbey, which he had sung in such noble verse. Dying when just four months short of forty-six, Fletcher had thus, as well as we can now calculate, altogether some fourteen years and six months more of life than the poet who divides with him the imperial inheritance of their common glory.

The perfect union in genius and in friendship which has made one name of the two names of these great twin brothers in song is a thing so admirable and so delightful to remember, that it would seem ungracious and unkindly to claim for either a precedence which we may be sure he would have been eager to disclaim. But if a distinction must be made between the Dioscuri of English poetry, we must admit that Beaumont was the twin of heavenlier birth. Only as Pollux was on one side a demigod of diviner blood than Castor can it be said that on any side Beaumont was a poet of higher and purer genius than Fletcher ; but so much must be allowed by all who have eyes and ears to discern in the fabric of their common work a distinction without a difference. Few things are stranger

than the avowal of so great and exquisite a critic as Coleridge that he could trace no faintest line of demarcation between the plays which we owe mainly to Beaumont and the plays which we owe solely to Fletcher. To others this line has always appeared in almost every case unmistakable. Were it as hard and broad as the line which marks off, for example, Shakespeare's part from Fletcher's in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the harmony would of course be lost which now informs every work of their common genius, and each play of their writing would be such another piece of magnificent patchwork as that last gigantic heir of Shakespeare's invention, the posthumous birth of his parting Muse which was suckled at the breast of Fletcher's as a child of godlike blood might be reared on the milk of a mortal mother—or in this case, we might sometimes be tempted to say, of a she-goat who left in the veins of the heaven-born suckling somewhat too much of his nurse Amalthæa. That question however belongs in any case more properly to the study of Shakespeare than to the present subject in hand. It may suffice here to observe that the contributions of Fletcher to the majestic temple of tragedy left incomplete by Shakespeare show the lesser workman almost equally at his best and at his worst, at his weakest and at his strongest. In the plays which we know by evidence surer than the most trustworthy tradition to be the common work of Beaumont and Fletcher, there is indeed no trace of such incongruous and incompatible admixture as leaves the greatest example of romantic tragedy—for *Cymbeline* and the *Winter's Tale*, though not guiltless of blood, are in their issues no more tragic than *Pericles* or the *Tempest*—an unique instance of glorious imperfection, a hybrid of heavenly and other than heavenly breed, disproportioned and divine. But throughout these

noblest of the works inscribed generally with the names of both dramatists we trace on every other page the touch of a surer hand, we hear at every other turn the note of a deeper voice, than we can ever recognise in the work of Fletcher alone. Although the beloved friend of Jonson, and in the field of comedy his loving and studious disciple yet in that tragic field where his freshest bays were gathered Beaumont was the worthiest and the closest follower of Shakespeare—unless indeed this credit may rather be due to Webster. In the external but essential matter of expression by rhythm and metre he approves himself always a student of Shakespeare's second manner, of the style in which the graver or tragic part of his historical or romantic plays is mostly written; doubtless the most perfect model that can be studied by any poet who, like Beaumont, is great enough to be in no danger of sinking to the rank of a mere copyist, but while studious of the perfection set before him is yet conscious of his own personal and proper quality of genius, and enters the presence of the master not as a servant but as a son. The general style of his tragic or romantic verse is as simple and severe in its purity of note and regularity of outline as that of Fletcher's is by comparison lax, effusive, exuberant. The matchless fluency and rapidity with which the elder brother pours forth the stream of his smooth swift verse gave probably the first occasion for that foolish rumour which has not yet fallen duly silent, but still murmurs here and there its suggestion that the main office of Beaumont was to correct and contain within bounds the overflowing invention of his colleague. The poet who while yet a youth had earned by his unaided mastery of hand such a crown as was bestowed by the noble love and the loving 'envy' of Ben Jonson was, according to this



tradition, a mere precocious pedagogue, fit only to revise and restrain the too liberal effusions of his elder in genius as in years. Now, in every one of the plays common to both, the real difficulty for a critic is not to trace the hand of Beaumont, but to detect the touch of Fletcher. Throughout the better part of every such play, and above all of their two masterpieces, *Philaster* and *The Maid's Tragedy*, it should be clear to the most sluggish or cursory of readers that he has not to do with the author of *Valentinian* and *The Double Marriage*. In those admirable tragedies the style is looser, more fluid, more feminine. From the first scene to the last we are swept as it were along the race of a running river, always at full flow of light and buoyant melody, with no dark reaches or perilous eddies, no stagnant pools or sterile sandbanks; its bright course only varied by sudden rapids or a stronger ripple here and there, but in rough places or smooth still stirred and sparkling with summer wind and sun. But in those tragic poems of which the dominant note is the note of Beaumont's genius a subtler chord of thought is sounded, a deeper key of emotion is touched, than ever was struck by Fletcher. The lighter genius is palpably subordinate to the stronger, and loyally submits itself to the impression of a loftier spirit. It is true that this distinction is never grave enough to produce a discord: it is also true that the plays in which the predominance of Beaumont's mind and style is generally perceptible make up altogether but a small section of the work that bears their names conjointly; but it is no less true that within this section the most precious part of that work is comprised. Outside it we shall find no figures so firmly drawn, no such clearness of outline, no such cunning of hand, as we recognise in the three great studies of Bellario,

Evadne, and Aspatia. In his male characters, as for instance in the parts of Philaster and Arbaces, Beaumont also is apt to show something of that exaggeration or inconsistency for which his colleague is more frequently if not more heavily to blame ; but in these there is not a jarring note, not a touch misplaced ; unless, indeed, a rigid criticism may condemn as unfeminine and incongruous with the gentle beauty of her pathetic patience the device by which Aspatia procures herself the death desired at the hand of Amintor. This is noted as a fault by Mr. Dyce ; but may well be forgiven for the sake of the magnificent scene which follows, and the highest tragic effect ever attained on the stage of either poet. That this as well as the greater part of those other scenes which are the glory of the poem is due to Beaumont might readily be shown at length by the process of comparison. The noble scene of regicide, which it was found expedient to cancel during the earlier years of the Restoration, may indeed be the work of Fletcher ; but the part of Evadne may almost certainly be in the main assigned to the more potent hand of his fellow. There is a fine harmony of character between her naked audacity in the second act and her fierce repentance in the fourth, which is not unworthy a disciple in the tragic school of Shakespeare ; Fletcher is less observant of the due balance, less heedful of the nice proportions of good and evil in a faulty and fiery nature, compounded of perverse instinct and passionate reaction. From him we might have had a figure as admirable for vigour of handling, but hardly in such perfect keeping as this of Beaumont's Evadne, the murderess-Magdalen, whose penitence is of one crimson colour with her sin. Nor even in Fletcher's *Ordella*, worthy as the part is throughout even of the precious and exquisite praise

of Lamb, is there any such cunning touch of tenderness or delicate perfume of pathos as in the parts of Bellario and Aspatia. These have in them a bitter sweetness, a subtle pungency of mortal sorrow and tears of divine delight, beyond the reach of Fletcher. His highest studies of female character have dignity, energy, devotion of the heroic type ; but they never touch us to the quick, never waken in us any finer and more profound sense than that of applause and admiration. There is a modest pathos now and then in his pictures of feminine submission and slighted or outraged love ; but this submission he is apt to make too servile, this love too doglike in its abject devotion, to retain that tender reverence which so many generations of readers have paid to the sweet memories of Aspatia and Bellario. To excite compassion was enough for Fletcher, as in the masculine parts of his work it was enough for him to excite wonder, to sustain curiosity, to goad and stimulate by any vivid and violent means the interest of readers or spectators. The single instance of noble pathos, the one scene he has left us which appeals to the higher and purer kind of pity, is the death of the child Hengo in *Bonduca*—a scene which of itself would have sufficed to enrol his name for ever on the list of our great tragic poets. To him we may probably assign the whole merit of that fiery and high-toned tragedy, with all its spirit and splendour of national and martial passion ; the conscious and demonstrative exchange of courtesy between Roman and Briton, which is one of the leading notes of the poem, has in it a touch of overstrained and artificial chivalry characteristic of Fletcher ; yet the parts of Caratach and Pœnius may be counted among the loftiest and most equal of his creations. But no surer test or better example can be taken of the distinctive

quality which denotes the graver genius of either poet than that supplied by a comparison of Beaumont's *Triumph of Love* with Fletcher's *Triumph of Death*. Each little play, in the brief course of its single act, gives proof of the peculiar touch and special trick of its author's hand : the deeper and more delicate passion of Beaumont, the rapid and ardent activity of Fletcher, have nowhere found a more noticeable vent for the expression respectively of the most tender and profound simplicity of quiet sweetness, the most buoyant and impatient energy of tragic emotion. Of the two other interludes which compose their *Four Plays in One*, *The Triumph of Honour* is a rather heavy example of Beaumont's more Jonsonian style, *The Triumph of Time* a slight allegoric masque very gracefully versified in the easiest and most flowing style of Fletcher, with which we may compare the graver elegance of Beaumont's *Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn*.

In the wider field of their comic or romantic drama it is yet easier to distinguish the respective work of either hand. The bias of Fletcher was towards mixed comedy ; his lightest and wildest humour is usually crossed or tempered by an infusion of romance ; like Shakespeare in this one point at least, he has left no single play without some touch in it of serious interest, of poetic eloquence or fancy, however slight and fugitive. Beaumont, evidently under the imperious influence of Ben Jonson's more rigid theories, seems rather to have bent his genius with the whole force of a resolute will into the form or mould prescribed for comedy by the elder and greater comic poet. The admirable study of the worthy citizen and his wife, who introduce to the stage and escort with their applause *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* through his adventurous career to its untimely end, has all the

force and fullness of Jonson's humour at its best, with more of freshness and freedom. In pure comedy, varied with broad farce and mock-heroic parody, Beaumont was the earliest as well as the ablest disciple of the master whose mantle was afterwards to be shared among the academic poets of a younger generation, the Randolphs and Cartwrights who sought shelter under the shadow of its voluminous folds. The best example of the school of Jonson to be found outside the ample range of his own work is *The Scornful Lady*, a comedy whose exceptional success and prolonged popularity must have been due rather to the broad effect of its forcible situations, its wealth and variety of ludicrous incidents, and the strong gross humour of its dialogue, than to any finer quality of style, invention, or character. It is the only work of Beaumont and Fletcher which a critic who weighs the meaning of his words can admit to be almost as coarse as the coarser work of Ben Jonson. They are prone indeed to indulge elsewhere in a wanton and exuberant license of talk ; and Fletcher at least is liable to confuse the shades of right and wrong, to deface or efface the boundary lines of good and evil, to stain the ermine of virtue and palliate the nakedness of vice with the same indecorous and incongruous laxity of handling. Often, in mere haste to despatch the business of a play, to huddle up a catastrophe or throw out some particular scene into sharp and immediate relief, he will sacrifice all seemliness and consistency of character to the present aim of stage effect, and the instant impression of strong incident or audacious eloquence. His heroines are too apt to utter sentiments worthy of Diana in language unworthy of Doll Tearsheet. But in this play both style and sentiment are throughout on a lower level, the action and emotion are of a baser



kind than usual ; the precept of Aristotle and the practice of Jonson have been so carefully observed and exaggerated that it might almost be said to offer us in one or two places an imitation not merely of the sorrier but of the sorriest qualities of human nature ; and full as it is of spontaneous power and humorous invention, the comedy extolled by the moral Steele (with just so much of reservation as permits him to deprecate the ridicule cast upon the clerical character) is certainly more offensive to artistic law and æsthetic judgment by the general and ingrained coarseness of its tone than the tragi-comedy denounced by the immoral Dryden as exceeding in license his own worst work and that of his fellow-playwrights ; an imputation, be it said in passing, as groundless as the protest pleaded on their behalf is impudent ; for though we may hardly agree with the uncompromising panegyrist who commends that play in particular to the approval of 'the austere scarlet' (remembering, perhaps, that Aristophanes was the chosen bedfellow of Chrysostom), there is at least no such offence against art or taste in the eccentricity of its situations or the daring of its dialogue. The buoyant and facile grace of Fletcher's style carries him lightly across quagmires in which a heavier-footed poet, or one of slower tread, would have stuck fast, and come forth bemired to the knees. To Beaumont his stars had given as birthright the gifts of tragic pathos and passion, of tender power and broad strong humour ; to Fletcher had been allotted a more fiery and fruitful force of invention, a more aerial ease and swiftness of action, a more various readiness and fullness of bright exuberant speech. The genius of Beaumont was deeper, sweeter, nobler than his elder's : the genius of Fletcher more brilliant, more supple, more prodigal and more voluble than

his friend's. Without a taint or a shadow on his fame of such imitative servility as marks and degrades the mere henchman or satellite of a stronger poet, Beaumont may fairly be said to hold of Shakespeare in his tragedy, in his comedy of Jonson ; in each case rather as a kinsman than as a client, as an ally than as a follower : but the more special province of Fletcher was a land of his own discovering, where no later colonist has ever had power to settle or to share his reign. With the mixed or romantic comedy of Shakespeare it has nothing in common except the admixture or alternation of graver with lighter interest, of serious with humorous action. Nothing is here of his magic exaltation or charm of fairy empire. The rare and rash adventures of Fletcher on that forbidden track are too sure to end in pitiful and shameful failure. His crown of praise is to have created a wholly new and wholly delightful form of mixed comedy or dramatic romance, dealing merely with the humours and sentiments of men, their passions and their chances ; to have woven of all these a web of emotion and event with such gay dexterity, to have blended his colours and combined his effects with such exquisite facility and swift light sureness of touch, that we may return once and again from those heights and depths of poetry to which access was forbidden him, ready as ever to enjoy as of old the fresh incomparable charm, the force and ease and grace of life, which fill and animate the radiant world of his romantic invention. Neither before him nor after do we find, in this his special field of fancy and of work, more than shadows or echoes of his coming or departing genius. Admirable as are his tragedies already mentioned, rich in splendid eloquence and strong in large grasp of character as is the Roman history of *The False One*, full of interest and

vigour as is the better part of *Rollo Duke of Normandy*, and sublime in the loveliness of passion as is the one scene of perfect beauty and terror which crowns this latter tragedy, Fletcher may claim a yet higher and more special station among his great dramatic peers by right of his comic and romantic than by right of his tragic and historic plays. Even in these he is more a romantic than a tragic poet. The quality of his genius, never sombre or subtle or profound, bears him always towards fresh air and sunshine. His natural work is in a midday world of fearless boyish laughter and hardly bitter tears. There is always more of rainbow than of storm in his skies ; their darkest shadow is but a tragic twilight. What with him is the noon of night would seem as sunshine on the stage of Ford or Webster. There is but one passage in all these noble plays which lifts us beyond a sense of the stage, which raises our admiration out of speech into silence, tempers and transfigures our emotion with a touch of awe. And this we owe to the genius of Beaumont, exalted for an instant to the very tone and manner of Shakespeare's tragedy, when Amintor stands between the dead and the dying woman whom he has unwittingly slain with hand and tongue. The first few lines that drop from his stricken lips are probably the only verses of Beaumont or Fletcher which might pass for Shakespeare's even with a good judge of style :—

This earth of mine doth tremble, and I feel  
A stark affrighted motion in my blood ;  
My soul grows weary of her house, and I  
All over am a trouble to myself.

But in Fletcher's tragedy, however we may be thrilled and kindled with high contagious excitement, we are never awed into dumb delight or dread, never

pierced with any sense of terror or pity too deep or even deep enough for tears. Even his *Brunhalts* and *Martias* can hardly persuade us to forget for the moment that 'they do but jest, poison in jest.' A critic bitten with the love of classification might divide those plays of Fletcher usually ranked together as comedies into three kinds : the first he would class under the head of pure comedy, the next of heroic or romantic drama, the third of mixed comedy and romance ; in this, the last and most delightful division of the poet's work, the special qualities of the two former kinds being equally blended and delicately harmonised. The most perfect and triumphant examples of this class are *The Spanish Curate*, *Monsieur Thomas*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *The Elder Brother*. Next to these, and not too far below them, we may put *The Little French Lawyer* (a play which in its broad conception of a single eccentric humour suggests the collaboration of Beaumont and the influence of Jonson, but in style and execution throughout is perfect Fletcher), *The Humorous Lieutenant* (on which an almost identical verdict might be passed), *Women Pleased*, *Beggars' Bush*, and perhaps we might add *The Fair Maid of the Inn* ; in most if not in all of which the balance of exultant and living humour with serious poetic interest of a noble and various kind is held with even hand and the skill of a natural master. In pure comedy *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* is the acknowledged and consummate masterpiece of Fletcher. Next to it we might class, for comic spirit and force of character, *Wit Without Money*, *The Wildgoose Chase*, *The Chances*, and *The Noble Gentleman*—a broad poetic farce to whose overflowing fun and masterdom of extravagance no critic has ever done justice but Leigh Hunt, who has ventured, not without reason, to match

its joyous and preposterous audacities of superlative and sovereign foolery with the more sharp-edged satire and practical merriment of *King and No King*, where the keen prosaic humour of Bessus and his swordsmen is as typical of the comic style in which Beaumont had been trained up under Ben Jonson as the high interest and graduated action of the serious part of the play are characteristic of his more earnest genius. Among the purely romantic plays of Fletcher, or those in which the comic effect is throughout subordinate to the romantic, *The Knight of Malta* seems most worthy of the highest place for the noble beauty and exaltation of spirit which inform it with a lofty life, for its chivalrous union of heroic passion and Catholic devotion. This poem is the fairest and the first example of those sweet fantastic paintings in rose-colour and azure of visionary chivalry and ideal holiness, by dint of which the romance of more recent days has sought to cast the glamour of a mirage over the darkest and deadliest 'ages of faith.' The pure and fervent eloquence of the style is in perfect keeping with the high romantic interest of character and story. In the same class we may rank among the best samples of Fletcher's workmanship, *The Pilgrim*, *The Loyal Subject*, *A Wife for a Month*, *Love's Pilgrimage*, and *The Lover's Progress*—rich all of them in exquisite writing, in varied incident, in brilliant effects and graceful or passionate interludes. In *The Coxcomb* and *The Honest Man's Fortune*—two plays which, on the whole, can hardly be counted among the best of their class—there are tones of homelier emotion, touches of a simpler and more pathetic interest than usual; and here, as in the two admirable first scenes between Leucippus and Bacha, which relieve and redeem from contempt the tragic burlesque of *Cupid's*



*Revenge*, the note of Beaumont's manner is at once discernible. This can be traced in only two other plays as yet unmentioned : *The Laws of Candy*, a rather crude and sterile specimen of romantic comedy, and *Wit at Several Weapons*, a violent farce, outrageous but not unamusing, ambitious rather than felicitous as a study in the school of Jonson. Two later comedies of Fletcher's, *The Sea-Voyage* and *The Nice Valour*, have less than usual of his easy grace and brightness of style to atone for the impotent extravagance and the vehement inanity of their feeble and foolish and incomposite groundwork. No other plays in the collection are so barren of merit as these : for the demerit of *The Faithful Friends* is hardly more obvious than its apocryphal character. Less palpably apocryphal, but far enough from unquestionable, is the attribution to Fletcher or to Jonson of a share in Middleton's light and brilliant comedy of *The Widow*. The attempt of Fletcher to emulate Shakespeare by writing a sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew* displays as light-hearted an audacity and achieves as dubious a success as his enterprise in the completion of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* ; in either case there is enough of brilliant and facile energy to make us realise the writer's inadequacy for the task undertaken at least as vividly as if the adventurer had been a less able playwright and a less admirable master of light and ready improvisation. *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*, is a splendid example of clever and dexterous incompetence, of superb and daring inability, to compete with a genius too great for the rivalry of a greater than its author. *The Prophetess* is amusing and well written, but hopelessly incongruous in structure and radically unimaginative in conception ; *The Mad Lover* is equally preposterous

on these grounds, but more coherent in its construction and more consistent in its extravagance; *The Queen of Corinth* is hardly redeemed from failure by rare interludes of interest and beauty among scenes of unattractive and violent mediocrity. *Love's Cure, or The Martial Maid*, is even more agreeable than absurd as an example of Fletcher's very lightest and hastiest manner; *The Island Princess*, more outrageous in its incongruities, is at once livelier and more serious in style; *The Maid in the Mill* is chiefly noticeable for the singular and incongruous alliance of the city and the court in the persons of its authors, Rowley and Fletcher—a severe censor might add, for the union of rudeness and vulgarity on one side with corruption and affectation on the other; *The Night-Walker* is very spirited in manner, very extravagant in matter; *The Captain* is admirable in style and versification throughout, admirable in dramatic evolution of character and conduct of serious incident up to the point where the depravity of the leading figure passes into a monstrous form of madness and disfigures the comic harmony with an infusion of worse than tragic horror.

Even the most rapid revision of the work done by these great twin poets must impress every capable student with a sense of the homage due to this living witness of their large and liberal genius. The loss of their names from the roll of English poetry would be only less than the loss of the few greatest inscribed on it. Nothing could supply the want of their tragic, their comic or romantic drama; no larger or more fiery planet can ever arise to supplant or to eclipse the twin lights of our zodiac. Whatever their faults of shortcoming or excess, there is in their very names or the mere thought of their common work a kind of special and personal attraction for all true lovers of

high dramatic poetry. There is the glory and grace of youth in all they have left us ; if there be also somewhat too much of its graceless as well as its gracious qualities, yet there hangs about their memory as it were a music of the morning, a breath and savour of bright early manhood, a joyous and vigorous air of free life and fruitful labour, which might charm asleep for ever all thought or blame of all mortal infirmity or folly. For good or for evil, they are above all things poets of youth ; we cannot conceive of them grown grey in the dignity of years, venerable with the authority of long life, and weighted with the wisdom of experience. In the Olympian circle of the gods and the giants of our race who on earth were their contemporaries and corrivals, they seem to move among the graver presences and figures of sedater fame like the two spoilt boys of heaven, lightest of foot and heart and head of all the brood of deity. Shakespeare may have smiled as Jonson may have nodded approval of their bright swift work, neither of these great elders grudging his praise to the special charm which won for it a preference during one generation at least even over their own loftier and weightier verse ; and indeed the advance in natural ease, in truth and grace of dialogue, is alike manifest whether we turn to such of their comic characters as Valentine and Don John, Rutilio and Monsieur Thomas, from the *Truewit* of Jonson or even from the *Mercutio* of Shakespeare ; the one too stiff with classic starch, the other too full of mere verbal catches and forced conceits, to persuade us that either can in any age have fairly represented the light free talk and facile humour of its youth. In another field than this Beaumont and Fletcher hold as high and secure a station of their own as any poet of their race. In perfect workmanship of lyrical jewellery,

in perfect bloom and flower of song-writing, they equal all compeers whom they do not excel ; the blossoms of their growth in this kind may be matched for colour and fragrance against Shakespeare's, and for morning freshness and natural purity of form exceed the finest grafts of Jonson. *The Faithful Shepherdess* alone might speak for Fletcher on this score, being as it is simply a lyric poem in semi-dramatic shape, to be judged only as such, and as such almost faultless ; but in no wise to be classed for praise or blame among the acting plays of its author, whose one serious error in the matter was the submission of his Dryad to the critical verdict of an audience too probably in great part composed of clowns and satyrs far unlike the loving and sweet-tongued sylvan of his lovely fancy. And in the very foolishhest and feeblest of his plays that divine song of melancholy (*mæstius lacrymis Simonideis*), perfect in form as Catullus and profound in sentiment as Shelley, which Milton himself could but echo and expand, could not heighten or deepen its exquisite intensity of thought and word alike, bears witness enough for the gayer and lighter poet of a lyric power as pure and rare as his loftier and graver comrade's.

The excess of influence and popularity over that of other poets usually ascribed to the work of Beaumont and Fletcher for some half-century or so after their own time has perhaps been somewhat overstated by tradition. Whatever may have been for a season the fashion of the stage, it is certain that Shakespeare can show two editions for one against them in folio ; four of all from 1623 to 1685, while they have but their two in 1647 and 1679. Nor does one see how it can accurately or even plausibly be said that they were in any exact sense the founders of a school either in comedy

or in tragedy. Massinger, for some years their survivor, and in some points akin to them as a workman, cannot properly be counted as their disciple ; and no leading poet of the time had so much in common with them as he. At first sight, indeed, his choice of romantic subject and treatment of foreign stories, gathered from the fertile tale-tellers of the south, and ranging in date from Boccaccio to Cervantes, may seem to mark him out as a member of the same school ; but the deepest and most distinctive qualities of his genius set it apart from theirs ; though undoubtedly not so far that any discrepancy or discord should impair the excellence or injure the keeping of works in which he took part with Fletcher. Yet, placed beside theirs, the tone of his thought and speech seems by comparison severe as well as sober, and sad as well as severe. Their extravagant and boyish insanity of prostrate royalism is not more alien from his half pensive and half angry undertone of political protest than his usually careful and complete structure of story from their frequently lax and slovenly incoherence of character or plot, than his well composed and proportioned metre from their lighter and looser melodies, than the bitter insistence and elaborate acrimony of his judicial satire on hypocrisy or oppression from the gaiety or facility of mood which suffers them in the shifting of a scene to redeem their worst characters by some juggler's trick of conversion at the last moment allowed them to wind up a play with universal reconciliation and an act of oblivion on all hands. They could hardly have drawn with such steady skill and explicit finish an *Overreach* or a *Luke* ; but the strenuous and able work of Massinger at its highest point of success has no breath in it of their brighter and more immediate inspiration. *Shirley*, on



the other hand, may certainly be classed as a pupil who copied their style in water-colour ; his best tragedy and his best comedies might pass muster undetected among the plays of Fletcher, and might fairly claim to take rank above the lower class of these. In the finest work of Middleton we recognise an almost exact reproduction of Fletcher's metrical effects—a reversion of that flowing music, a reiteration of those feminine final notes. In his later tragi-comedies, throughout his masterpiece of *Women beware Women*, and in the noble scenes which make up the tragic or serious part of *The Changeling* or *The Spanish Gipsy*—wherever, in a word, we find the admirable but unequal genius of this poet at its best—we find a likeness wholly wanting in his earlier and ruder work, which undoubtedly suggests the influence of Fletcher. Other instances of imitation, other examples of discipleship, might perhaps be found among lesser men of the next generation ; but the mass of succeeding playwrights began in a very short time to lower the style and debase the scheme of dramatic poetry ; and especially to loosen the last ties of harmony, to deface the very form and feature of tragic verse. In Shirley, the last if not the least of those in whom the lineal blood of the old masters was yet discernible, we find side by side with the fine ancestral indications of legitimate descent exactly such marks of decadence rather than degeneracy as we might have anticipated in the latest heir of a long line which began with the rise of Marlowe, 'son of the morning,' in the highest heaven of our song, to prepare a pathway for the sun. After Shakespeare there was yet room for Beaumont and Fletcher ; but after these and the other constellations had set, whose lights filled up the measure of that diviner zodiac through which he moved, there was but room in

heaven for the gentle afterglow of Shirley ; and before this last reflex from a sunken sun was itself eclipsed, the glory had passed away from our drama, to alight upon that summit of epic song whence Milton held communion with darkness and the stars.

‘ I have never been able to distinguish the presence of Fletcher during the life of Beaumont, nor the absence of Beaumont during the survival of Fletcher.’ This most astonishing avowal was made by one of the greatest among poets, who was also—now and then, by fits and starts—a very great critic. It is sufficient to prove that his criticism of Beaumont and Fletcher must be throughout vitiated by prejudice or paralysed by incapacity to appreciate aright the merits or the demerits of those two immortal twins. But Coleridge was never systematic or coherent in criticism ; on poetry, on philosophy, on theology, on politics, he delivered his soul at random, and after such a fashion as to call up the fancy of a first-rate player at billiards or at chess who took pleasure in playing blindfold. His good hits, or his good moves, are naturally nothing less than admirable ; indeed, no subsequent player can hope to follow them ; but when he goes wrong he is more hopelessly wrong than the most incompetent novice. It is not, and it naturally could not have been, so easy to distinguish Beaumont from Fletcher as it is to distinguish Fletcher from Shakespeare ; but the radical difference between *The Scornful Lady* and *The Spanish Curate*, between *The Maid’s Tragedy* and *The Double Marriage*, between *Philaster* and *Valentinian*, must surely be perceptible to all eyes less sand-blind or high-gravel-blind than theirs who cannot at once verify the presence or the absence of Shakespeare’s hand in the text of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The immeasurable superiority of Beaumont as a tragic poet,

of Fletcher as a comic dramatist, is so patent, so glaring, so palpable, that we can only explain the hebetude or the perversity of Coleridge by the supposition that he had never really read the plays on which he thought fit to pass judgment in a tone of such fitful and vehement austerity. And yet, of course, his notes on them are more valuable, more helpful, more suggestive, than any other man's could be. Even when they are utterly and desperately perverse, they provide material for saner criticism and more serious reflection. They should be compared with the admirably sensible and careful estimate given of each play by Mr. Dyce in his exhaustive 'account of the lives and writings of Beaumont and Fletcher.' The sound and studious judgment of the editor is the best of all possible correctives to the headlong and haphazard verdicts of the more illustrious and less trustworthy commentator. It is of course impossible to ignore the critical imputations or objections of Coleridge; it is all the more necessary to examine their accuracy and validity with greater care than we should think it worth while to take in the case of a lesser man or critic. And the more thoroughly and impartially we do so, the more certainly and regretfully shall we perceive in his criticism a fusion of malevolence with incompetence, of prejudice with misconception, of would-be candour with obvious prepossession, which is difficult to understand in a critic of the nineteenth century when commenting on a poet of the seventeenth. 'It would be worth while,' he says, to note how many of these plays are founded on rapes, how many on incestuous passions, and how many on mere lunacies.' I should not have thought it at all worth while; but in face of so foul and injurious an insinuation it possibly may be. Among fifty-two plays there are exactly two which are founded on rapes,

*Valentinian* and *The Queen of Corinth* ; there is not one which is founded on an incestuous passion, for the whole action of *King and No King* hinges on the fact that Arbaces and Panthea are not brother and sister, but absolute strangers in blood ; and if we except *The Mad Lover* and *The Nice Valour*, which may fairly be held liable to such a charge, I cannot discover an example of the ' plays founded on mere lunacies.' Two lyric poets, immortal in their different degrees, have passed sentence on Beaumont and Fletcher ; and though I am not quite prepared to affirm with Lovelace that ' the austere scarlet ' might approve such a comedy as *The Custom of the Country*, I am certain that the kindly extravagance of his enthusiasm for these great if not blameless dramatists comes far nearer the truth than the captious if not rancorous commentary of Coleridge.

Printed in Great Britain by T. and A. CONSTABLE LTD.  
at the University Press, Edinburgh

96871













FEB 28 1972

PR5500 vol. 12 96871

.F25

Swinburne, Algernon Charles.  
The complete works of Algernon

. PR5500 vol. 12 96871

.F25

Swinburne, Algernon Charles.  
The complete works of Algernon  
Charles Swinburne.  
... 1925-1927.

LIBRARY OF  
MOUNT ST. MARY'S COLLEGE  
Emmitsburg, Maryland



